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TIME'S REVENGES

BY

DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY

AUTHOR OF

JOSEPH'S COAT' 'VAL STRANGE' 'BOB MARTIN'S LITTLE GIRL' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

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TIME'S REVENGES

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CHAPTER I

To be more royalist than the king is a common vice with a certain order of mind.

Mr. Stanley Mallard fell into it when, after thirty years of unusually profitable broker's work on the Liverpool 'Change, he decided to turn country gentleman. He was rich enough to be able to afford the gratification of his most expensive whims, and at the beginning he was quite resolute to be more exclusively and exquisitely 'county' than the county people among whom he proposed to spend the remnant of his days. He looked out, to begin with, for the oldest, the largest, and the most picturesque country mansion to be

had anywhere for love or money within the limits of England.

He did not want a feudal castle, or he would have had one. He wanted simply a country gentleman's house of the most unexceptionable type and character, and he found it in the neighbourhood of Heydon Hay, which, as all men should know, stands in the very heart of the English Midlands. The Abbey, for so the house was called, was but newly vacated by the Jessops, an ancient and honourable household, brought to untimely grief by injudicious speculation. It stood in the midst of a well-wooded park, at a distance of some three or four miles from its nearest county neighbour, and from its roof was visible the height of Beacon Hargate and the more distant hills of Quarrymore. All about it lay cultivated and prosperous farmlands, with here and there a homestead, built of that mellow-coloured red brick of which modern builders seem to have lost the secret.

Mr. Stanley Mallard had undoubtedly

secured the noblest house of its class in the county, but the place had one or two defects which he proposed to himself to obliterate. Its gardens, though beautiful and old-fashioned, were small. Mr. Mallard determined to enlarge them, and to make them the wonder of the neighbourhood. The vineeries were insignificant. They, too, were to be enlarged. There were one or two other comparative trifles of this nature, but the one thing which most appealed to the heart of the new owner was the desire to become a breeder of game, and to be renowned for the excellence of his coverts. For a man to be a county gentleman it seemed in some sort necessary to Mr. Mallard to be in a kind of superbly disdainful opposition to the common people. Now the common people at this time were in a state of some froth and uproar. Mr. Mallard opined that they were, in the main, better fed and housed and generally more pampered than common people had a right to be. He attributed the spread of

Chartism to these undoubted facts, and his soul abhorred a Whig as a true patriot soul must always hate the false half-ally who palters with the enemy. Mr. Stanley Mallard's father had himself so far belonged to the people as to wheel a fish-barrow in the East-End of London, but it had pleased Providence to make Mr. Mallard himself wealthier than the ordinary run of wealthy men, and, standing on the pile of money he had gathered for himself, he seemed to his own easily satisfied fancy to be at a very lofty height indeed above those from whose roots he had grown.

There was already a little shooting in the neighbourhood of the Abbey, but it was insignificant alike in quantity and quality, and Mr. Mallard would never have bought the place at all if he had not been aware of the fact that a ninety-nine years' lease was on the very eve of expiry. When he entered on possession at the Abbey this lease was held by Thomas Barton, a man of the solid English home-loving type, who conceived himself

rooted to the soil. His grandfather, his great-grandfather, and one ancestor even yet remoter had farmed the land before him. The place had been known as Barton's Farm time out of mind, and if it had ever owned an earlier name there was no local antiquarian who had found a record of it. Farmer Barton had one stalwart son, at this time four-and-twenty years of age, but no other kith or kin. The family somehow had died down to this, but the young fellow was engaged to be married, and the farmer lived in hope that he should yet see new branches springing from the old stock. Tom the younger was waiting only for a renewal of the lease, and expected that with the sort of unconscious certainty with which we all look for the rising of to-morrow's sun. The Bartons were not wealthy people, and, to tell the truth, the land they valued so highly was mainly of a sour, thin character, but it was their pride that the old rent-book, handed down from sire to son for nigh a hundred years, had been receipted

punctually every quarter-day without a break. They knew themselves to be excellent tenants, they were paying, all things considered, a fair value for the land, and, to their apprehension, the worst thing that could befall would be a bit of a friendly tussle between the agent and themselves with regard to an increase of rental. Perhaps they might be called on to pay a little more—perhaps not. Father and son talked the matter over, smoking their pipes by the kitchen fire of a night-time, and were inclined to be hopeful.

It fell upon them with such a shock as if Nature herself had gone to pieces when their application for a renewal of the lease was refused. Mr. Kelly, the Castle Barfield lawyer, who had acted for the Jessops during the elder Barton's lifetime, did his best to soften the blow. He wrote saying what admirable tenants they had been, and how strongly he had recommended their claims to the new proprietor. He expressed himself in terms of genuine sorrow for the decision which

had been arrived at. His own powers of protest were, of course, early exhausted. There was nothing else for it. They must go.

They made inquiries as to the intended disposition of the land, and could learn nothing. One or other of them, father or son, called almost daily at the agent's office for news. There was no incoming tenant. Mr. Mallard had given no sign of any intention to farm the land himself, and the one fact they elicited was that Mr. Kelly had received information to the effect that his services in regard to that one farm would no longer be needed.

The younger Barton had hitherto supposed himself to be a fairly good-natured and happy-minded fellow, but he took fire at all this, and went about in a state of constant flaming wrath. He cried his grievance everywhere, and denounced the new comer with perhaps unnecessary violence. The popular sympathy was entirely with him, and Mr. Stanley Mallard found himself amongst a sullen and

discontented populace. In Heydon Hay people refused to touch their hats to him as he rode or drove abroad, and in Castle Barfield he was publicly groaned at in the High Street. The thing that caught the popular imagination was that the elder Barton was manifestly broken. He had been a hale, jolly fellow, florid of complexion and broad of beam, and had always worn something of a bullying and dictatorial manner, through which shone a certain native good humour which had kept him popular. The ruddy complexion faded, the broad shoulders began to stoop, the jolly braggadocio voice fell to inarticulate murmurs. The plain English is, the man's heart was broken. He took no care for anything. He had been spruce in attire after his fashion, and now he grew to be a sloven. There were farms in plenty to be had just then, and on some of them he might have thriven. Either the Earl of Barfield or Sir Ferdinand de Blacquaire would willingly have strained a point in his favour. The eccentric old noble-

man and the dandy young baronet expressed sympathy, each in his own way, and the broken man was grateful if not much relieved.

‘The man’s a snob, sir,’ said my Lord Barfield. ‘He fancies because he has money that the people about here are going to know him. The people about here are *not* going to know him. You’re a good fellow, Barton, and if I can do anything for you, you let me know. The times are hard, deuced hard the times are, and in business there’s no such thing as friendship; but I’d sooner have a good tenant at a low rental than a bad one at a high one, and if you want a farm in the old neighbourhood, see Jeans about it, and I’ll take care that he deals well with you.’

‘I’m very much obliged to your lordship,’ said the old man, ‘and I’ll talk it over with him. I hadn’t looked to be turned out, my lord, and—and—’

‘Yes, yes, Barton. Yes,’ said his lordship, shaking hands hurriedly, ‘don’t you fret, Barton, don’t you fret.’

The old nobleman was very severe everywhere on Mr. Stanley Mallard, and of course he carried the county with him.

Sir Ferdinand rode to Barton's farm expressly to bid the old man to be of cheer.

'We hope we're not going to lose an old and valued neighbour, Barton. We should all be sorry if you decide to go away.'

He, too, proffered a farm to the old man, and mentioned terms which the other knew to be broadly generous. But nothing could greatly soothe the exile's sorrow. The emotion was no doubt unreasoning, and there are many people who will think it out of proportion with its cause. It was none the less real on that account, however, and when it turned out that the Bartons were expelled for no other reason than to make room for fur and feather, the whole of that division of the county was angrily excited. Mass meetings were held, and were addressed by orators from London and elsewhere. The newspapers, less openly courageous then than

now, made allusions to the matter, and the new county gentleman lived in perpetual hot water. But Mr. Stanley Mallard had his qualities as well as his defects, and amongst them were courage and tenacity. He held on his way, though in daily fear lest he should have to barricade himself and stand a siege. Captain Swing had not long ceased to do his wicked work by night, and in every hour of the twenty-four a horse stood ready saddled in the Abbey stables, and a groom was booted and spurred and fit to ride for yeomanry aid at any moment. All this excitement calmed down in a while, and events took an ordinary course again. Mr. Mallard found himself shunned alike by the county people and the vulgar, and would willingly have recalled his edict if he had not known that the fact of his having done so would be immediately shouted from the housetops.

Old Barton withered perceptibly, and the week before the farm was vacated he died. His funeral was widely attended, and there

was a huge crowd at the sale of farming stock, implements, and household effects three days later. There was some noisy horse-play at this latter function, and threats were pretty freely vented against Mr. Mallard, who had prudently found business in London. Tom Barton, now kinless, and, for the time being, homeless, said nothing, but his heart burned like a live coal within him. Many a dark thought of revenge crossed his mind, but he put the temptation steadily away from him, and from the hour of his father's death, at least, consumed his own smoke privately.

The crowd had all dispersed, and only Tom and the Barfield lawyer were left behind.

‘I must ask you for the key, Barton,’ said Mr. Kelly, ‘It’s my duty to hand that over to Mr. Mallard, and then, thank Heaven, I shall have done with this business. I haven’t often had a more unpleasant task thrust upon me.’

That was true enough, and Mr. Mallard’s

unwilling agent had run some risk earlier in the day of making acquaintance with the horse-pond, and only owed his safety to Tom's intervention.

'No fault of yours, Mr. Kelly,' said Barton, gloomily. 'You did your best, I know. There's the key, sir.' He surrendered it as he spoke.

The lawyer locked the front door of the house, after seeing that all was fast within, and offered the ejected tenant a lift as far as the village.

'No, thank you,' Tom responded. 'I'll walk. I won't trouble you to wait for me, Mr. Kelly.'

The lawyer, accepting this as a dismissal, shook hands, unhitched his horse from the gate, climbed into the trap, and drove away, leaving young Barton alone in the deserted yard. The young man filled and lit his pipe, and, sitting down on the woodwork of an old grindstone, ticketed 'Lot 204,' which some purchaser had as yet delayed to carry away,

he smoked gloomily, staring at the house he was born in.

Heydon Hay was a quiet place, and its people were unused to travel. From the hour when he was born, no other roof-tree than that of the old farm-place had ever sheltered the young man's slumber. He had never known how he had loved the place until now he was forced to part from it. His heart yearned over the very bricks and mortar, and in spite of himself his eyes grew dim. The closed shutters in the spring twilight gave the place a homeless look. It was so desolate and cold to the eye that it might well have sheltered no living creature for a year. There was a feeling of death about it, too, a sense at once solemn and eerie. The house he was born in, and had lived in till that day, half-frightened him. In its solitude and homelessness stood embodied.

The yard gate creaked a little on its hinges, but the young man was so deep sunk in his own bitter and mournful thoughts that

he heard no sound. A footstep came rustling through the disordered litter of straw, but he took no heed of that either. It was not till a hand was gently laid upon his shoulder, and a soft feminine voice addressed him, that he turned.

‘Tom, dear,’ said the voice.

A very pretty face was bending over him. It was paler than it should have been, and the eyes showed traces of recent tears, but they looked altogether courageous and tender and trustworthy.

‘My darling,’ said Tom, rising from his seat, and setting his pipe aside to take her by both hands, ‘what brings you here?’

‘I met Mr. Kelly in the lane,’ she answered, ‘and he told me you were here. I was coming up to look for you. I’ve felt that sorry, Tom, I can’t tell you.’

‘I know you have,’ he answered, putting his arms round her and drawing her to his breast.

A tear or two ran down his own cheeks,

but he brushed them away with his hand in a hasty shame.

‘I’ve been thinking about the old dad, my dear,’ he said, in apology for his own disturbance. ‘I’ve been thinking what he must have felt like this last half-year and more.’

‘I know, Tom, I know,’ she answered him, drawing down his face to kiss him. ‘It’s harder on old people than it is on young ones.’

She made no pretence of coyness or reserve, for she knew that this was not the hour for either, and she was a true woman from head to feet. Tom had begged for a kiss in vain many a time during their courtship, but now she caressed him unbidden. The touch of her hands and lips upon his cheek warmed his cold and desolate heart a little, but softened it at the same time, so that he felt afraid for his manhood.

‘My darling,’ he said, speaking with a gulp or two, ‘I felt that shaken and wretched

afore you came, and now you're that kind and sweet I could find it in my heart to cry like a great baby. I shan't do that, though,' he added, with a quaint doggedness. 'You see if I do.' He took up his pipe from the side of the grindstone and reseated himself, smoking with a quiet fury, and gradually reducing his emotions to order. The girl patted his shoulder from time to time, until he took possession of her hand and held it in both his own. 'You wouldn't have thought,' he said, 'that the old place ever could have looked that lonesome, would you? It don't look as if there'd ever been a birth or a death inside it.'

'It does look very lonesome,' the girl assented. 'Very lonesome.' Her voice sank to a plaintive tone, and her eye travelled over the drearily shuttered windows, which had taken a suddenly sightless aspect to her fancy. The familiar face of the old house looked dead. 'But Tom, dear,' she began in a brisker tone, 'it's no use sitting here and

grieving. Don't think that I don't like you to have your natural feeling ; I shouldn't care for a man at all if he didn't feel such a thing as this. This isn't the time to talk about it ; but we shall be happy yet, Tom. There's all the world before us, and you're young, my dear.'

'I don't look to feel always like this,' he answered, 'but I hadn't the heart to leave the place with the rest. It seemed to behove me, somehow, to sit down and say good-bye to it. My great-grandfather was born here in the old blue bedroom ; so was grandad. I can just remember him. So was dad. So was I. It's a bit of a hard pull to leave the place, there's no disguising that, Mary ; it's a hardish bit of a pull to go.'

She put her free hand round his neck and smoothed his shaven cheek with it, but made no verbal answer.

In a little while he rose of his own accord, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and put it in his pocket.

'My dear,' he said, turning on his companion with a braver air than he had yet worn, 'you've shown me more of your heart this last week than I ever saw before. If it hadn't been for you, Mary, I should have done something to be sorry for. You've held me up and kept me straight. I'll never forget it. If ever I should be tempted to be a careless husband I'll think of what you've been to me this last week, and, if I've got a man's heart in me——'

'Don't talk so, Tom,' she interrupted him. 'There's nobody in the world for me but you, and as for your ever being anything but a good man, I've no more doubt about that than I have about our being alive this minute.'

'I am sure of your love, my dear,' he answered gravely and tenderly, 'and if anything could make a man of me, that ought.'

He drew her to his breast again, and she laid her head upon his shoulder in silence for a while. Then he kissed her on the fore-

head with extreme solemnity, drew her arm through his, and walked with her to the gate.

They paused and turned there to take a last look at the house, and then went silently on together through the deepening twilight of the lanes.

They had not travelled far when the sound of hoof-beats became audible, and in another minute Sir Ferdinand de Blacquaire reined in beside them. He was well mounted, and looked a gallant figure.

‘That you, Barton?’ he asked, fixing an eyeglass to be sure of his man.

‘Yes, Sir Ferdinand,’ Tom answered. ‘It’s me.’

‘I was just at this minute thinking of you,’ said the magnate. He was not quite so refined and perfect a dandy as he had been in the days before his marriage, but the aristocratic tone he had learned at Cambridge was ineradicable, and would remain with him to the end of his days. In these level times

everybody—leaving out the purely rustic populations—talks pretty much like everybody else, and it is difficult, by mere accent, to distinguish a duke from a tailor. But in the days of which I write gentlemen had an accent of their own. Some of us remember the throaty drawl of Cambridge at that epoch. Sir Ferdinand had it in perfection, and the county folk thereabouts respected it and accepted it as the hall-mark of the English gentleman of modern time.

‘I can’t,’ said Sir Ferdinand, ‘undertake to keep the place open much longer, Barton. It carries two hundred and fifty pounds a year and a house with it, and coals. Altogether it’s worth a good three hundred. I wouldn’t trouble you to answer me before, but the whole affair’s going to wrack and ruin, and I must have a bailiff installed within a week. Now, can I ask you to say yes or no at once, like a good fellow?’

‘I’ve been thinking a good deal about your offer, Sir Ferdinand,’ the young man answered,

'and I don't think I'm likely to find anything else as good, not to talk of better.'

'Then,' said the baronet, 'I presume that you accept.'

'I'm very much obliged to you for the offer, Sir Ferdinand,' Tom answered, 'and I shall accept the place gratefully.'

'That's well,' returned the baronet, in his fashionable drawl. 'You understand the conditions, Barton. You take the place for a year, and the bargain is renewable annually or may be dissolved annually at the will of either of us. You enter on your duties at once, and the salary is payable quarterly.'

'Yes, Sir Ferdinand,' Tom answered. 'I shall be ready to begin work to-morrow, and I hope to be able to give you satisfaction.'

'I think you're the man for the place, Barton,' the baronet responded, 'and I've no doubt we shall get on together very nicely.'

Tom and his sweetheart had moved apart a little at Sir Ferdinand's arrival on the scene, but now that he had ridden a yard or two in

advance, and was talking over his shoulder, Mary had dared to take Tom's arm again. She hugged it a little in approval of his acceptance of Sir Ferdinand's offer, and the baronet said :

‘If you'll follow me, Barton, up to the Hall, I'll have a paper ready for you to sign by the time you get there.’

‘Very well, Sir Ferdinand,’ Tom answered.

Almost at the same instant Lady de Blacquaire swept up in her little pony carriage, and arrested it beside the lovers.

‘Mary,’ she said, somewhat tartly, ‘what are you doing here?’

‘If your ladyship will excuse me,’ said Tom, blushing in the dark, ‘I've just taken the place of bailiff under Sir Ferdinand, and Mary and me have fixed to get married in about half a year from now.’

‘Indeed,’ said her ladyship ; ‘I hope you'll make her a good husband.’

‘I'll try,’ said Tom, simply.

‘I shall lose the best maid I ever had,’ said her ladyship, and so drove on.

CHAPTER II.

MR. STANLEY MALLARD, to the bitter discontentment of the neighbouring farmers, took measures at once to stock the land of which he had dispossessed the Bartons. He might have bought as many pheasants as he chose, and he might even for a while have allowed the ground game to run wild, and multiply at its own will, without exciting anger. But the new proprietor was for having everything at once, and he imported live hares and rabbits by the hundred, and had them turned loose upon his grounds. The young crops in the neighbourhood were devastated, and Mr. Stanley Mallard became the best hated man in that region of Her Majesty's dominions. He was but little seen for some time after the eviction of the Bar-

tons, his place at the Abbey being taken by his son, who was captain in a marching regiment.

This young gentleman had many qualities which would, under more favourable circumstances, have made him popular. He was good-looking, and had a genial temperament, and if he had been left entirely to make his own way would have done well enough. He had, however, to endure all the obloquy which attached to his father's acts, and encountered an ill-will so evident and outspoken that it might easily have soured a better temper than his own. His geniality was no more than the product of health and high spirits. The high spirits were greatly damped by the purposed insolence of his poorer neighbours, and the icy coldness of those whose sympathy he thought he had a right to ask for. They fell at last to zero, and then the unfortunate young gentleman took to moping at home, oppressed with an unconquerable sense of failure and disappointment. He

wrote one or two letters to his father, urging upon him the advisability of putting the estate once more upon the market; but the elder man returned no answer to these appeals. Captain Mallard found his sojourn at the Abbey duller and more exasperating day by day, and was meditating flight when he received the first call with which the Abbey had been honoured by any person of county consequence since the incoming of the new tenant.

The visitor was Parson Heathcote, Lady Barfield's cousin, an old gentleman renowned throughout the district on three or four separate grounds. First of all, his family position lent him dignity, and he was a favourite in high places all England over. Next he was respected as an art critic, and as the owner of the finest private gallery within local knowledge. He was a familiar figure in the London studios during the season, and was an indefatigable buyer of the works of young men of real but unrecognised talent. The parson's

protégés were always coming to the fore, and there was probably no gallery in England of an equal money value which had been gathered at so little cost. Parson Heathcote's best claim to fame, however, lay in the uncompromising plainness of his speech. He had a manner of perfect courtliness, at once suave and commanding, which helped him to say things which most people confined themselves to thinking. Captain Mallard had an experience of his powers in that direction which he was not likely to forget.

‘I am charmed to meet you, Mr. Heathcote,’ said the captain. ‘Your name, of course, has always been familiar to me.’

The young gentleman meant to be agreeable, and his manner was cordial and ingratiatory. Parson Heathcote had no such intention, and he responded to the young gentleman’s greeting by a mere questioning lift of the eyebrows and a bend of the head.

‘I regret,’ said the captain, ‘that my father is not at home to receive you. He has

business in London, and is not likely to be down here before the end of the season.'

Parson Heathcote raised his eyebrows anew, but still said nothing. The captain besought him to be seated, and proffered refreshment. Would Mr. Heathcote stay to luncheon? It would be served in an hour in the ordinary course, but should be hastened or delayed at his goodwill and pleasure.

'Thank you, no,' said the parson. 'In point of fact, Captain Mallard, I am here on rather a disagreeable errand. I am sorry that your father is not here, because my business is really with him. You, I dare say, will be good enough to represent to him something of what I have to say.'

'I was not aware, sir,' said Captain Mallard, 'that my father had yet had the pleasure of meeting you.'

'Nor has he,' Mr. Heathcote answered; 'but you see, Captain Mallard, that I have a flock here which is accustomed to look to me for advice and assistance in respect to many

matters which are not usually thought to be within the cleric's province.' He was polished, bland, suave to the uttermost, and, leaning back in his chair with one leg thrown over the other, looked almost insolently at home. He toyed with his gold-rimmed double eye-glass, and now and then stuck it across his eagle beak to examine his host.

'I can quite understand that, sir,' said Captain Mallard, foreboding what was coming.

'Quite so,' said Mr. Heathcote. 'Quite so. Well, Captain Mallard, the case is this. My sheep are getting into a desperately entangled rout, and I must appeal to your father to aid me in returning them to something like order.'

'To my father, sir?'

'It is your father, Captain Mallard, who has unconsciously disturbed my little regiment. I have unwillingly been compelled to listen to much gross language in my time. It has been one of my duties as a clergyman and a man of taste to do what I could to eradicate

the habit of profane swearing. Since your father's arrival, Captain Mallard, I have found my best efforts unavailing.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Captain Mallard, 'but I really don't quite understand you.'

'Let me try to make myself intelligible,' said Mr. Heathcote. 'Let me ask you, to begin with, if you have conversed with any of the farmers whose land abuts on what used to be known as Barton's Farm?'

'I have not, sir,' the captain answered, curtly.

'Exactly,' said the clergyman. 'Exactly. Had you done so I might have been saved the necessity of saying some unpleasant things. These poor fellows report to me that for acres all round the Barton Farm their crops are ruined. Your father, so they inform me, has imported ground game in great quantities. Agricultural business is, and has been for the last few years, as bad as can well be fancied, and I think you will confess, Captain Mallard,

that one man in search of a week or two of amusement in the year stretches his privileges a little too far if he bring ruin on half a score of families.'

'I think, sir,' said Captain Mallard, who by this time had grown as stiff as he had been urbane at the beginning of the interview, 'I think, sir, that your informants have probably exaggerated the damage done by a few hares and rabbits.'

'I myself thought that not unlikely,' Mr. Heathcote responded, 'until I rode over a portion of the ground this morning. You can look into the matter for yourself, and if you will do that the object of my visit will be achieved.'

'Had we been met here in a proper spirit, sir,' cried the captain, somewhat loudly, 'had we encountered anything but the most determined and the most groundless enmity—'

'Pardon me,' said the clergyman, bland and cool as ever, 'you have not acquainted yourself with the facts. There are two sides

to every case, and in the view of the good people hereabouts the enmity is not groundless. Had any one of the oldest, the most popular, the best-behaved landowners in the county wantonly dismissed an excellent old tenant and made his farm into a desert, he would have been execrated by his neighbours. A stranger doing this, and expecting to be received with open arms, presents an interesting and curious spectacle.'

Captain Mallard, at the clergyman's interruption, had walked smartly to the window. He stood there, drumming one foot angrily on the carpet, and when Mr. Heathcote paused, he turned with a look and voice of offended dignity.

' Your position, Mr. Heathcote,' he said, ' is universally acknowledged to afford you certain privileges. You speak of privilege, sir. *I* speak of privilege. It is perhaps as possible for a clergyman to exceed the due line as for a landowner.'

Mr. Heathcote was not only unruffled, but

looked as if he were incapable of being disturbed in any way. He toyed with his gold eyeglass, and waved it hither and thither in a way which was partly conciliatory, but partly, as the young officer thought, at least, disdainful.

‘Captain Mallard,’ he replied, ‘I disclaim all desire to give offence. I beg you to accept my disclaimer. My only object in this matter is to heal an unhappy breach of temper which has probably been brought about by an act of thoughtlessness which may be remedied at any moment.’

‘My father is the responsible person here,’ the captain answered, in no wise mollified, ‘and I think I can hardly do better than refer you to him.’

The tone was decisive, and the speech was intended to close the interview.

‘Permit me, Captain Mallard,’ said Mr. Heathcote, ‘to assure you that the position is one of some seriousness. I am sure that when you are once acquainted with the facts

your view of the situation will change. A very estimable old man, whom I knew intimately for forty years, has died literally of a broken heart. He was dispossessed—I will not say wantonly, but thoughtlessly—by a stranger whom he had never injured. I am not offering reproaches, Captain Mallard, I am stating facts. Your father has made a grave mistake. A good man, discovering an error so vital, will do his best to retrace his steps. Consider, sir, if you had been rooted to the soil——'

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ cried the captain. ‘I decline to listen to an indictment of my father in his absence, and I am not in a position either to defend him or to sit in judgment on him.’

‘I am sure, Captain Mallard,’ returned Heathcote, rising, ‘that you will do what you can to put away any cause of irritation. If you and I should quarrel about this matter, I should have done great harm. I will not be a party to mischief if I can help it; but

can't we possibly talk about this matter without anger on either side? My influence, I assure you, sir, is exerted on the side of peace. If you choose to exert yourself in the same cause everything may yet be well.'

'I cannot hear my father's conduct arraigned,' declared Mallard. 'If he can learn that he has done damage unwittingly to any interest he will be willing to compensate. You will excuse me if I add that I can carry this discussion no further.'

'May I ask this one thing of you, Captain Mallard?' the clergyman asked. 'May I ask that you will represent to your father the facts of the case? I came here with an ungracious and difficult task, and I daresay I have performed it awkwardly. But will you, forgetting any irritation I may have caused, look into the matter for yourself? I assure you it is worth investigation. And will you report it to your father?'

'I undertake that, sir,' Mallard answered,

and there, practically, was an end of the interview.

The parson mounted his cob at the door, and rode away, fairly satisfied with himself and his own proceedings, as he had a knack of being. Captain Mallard remained behind, less pleased with the turn the interview had taken. On the whole he was inclined to think that he had acquitted himself well, but he admitted in his secret heart that the original position was not easily defensible.

‘The fact is,’ he said to himself, as he marched soldier-like up and down the smoking room, ‘the fact is that the governor has made a dreadful blunder. As far as our name is known it’s hated—like poison. It was a mistake in tactics. We ought to have conciliated everybody. As it is the governor comes swooping down like the wolf on the fold, and has spoiled not only his own chances of success, but mine. The people here won’t look at us, and the worst of it is that the people here go everywhere. I must confess

the governor's a blunderer. The farmers don't matter so much ; but to have made friends with old Barfield would have carried us anywhere. De Blacquaire's a good man, too. It's no use to sell this place and start elsewhere, for we've been talked about from John o' Groat's to Land's End. The only thing is to live it down. Better begin by conciliating the farmers.'

A servant broke in on his meditations with the announcement that luncheon was served, and he pursued his reflections over the meal. The result was that he ordered a horse to be saddled, and rode away in search of the nearest farmer. He worked himself resolutely back to good humour, and by the time he had found his man he felt thoroughly genial and well-intentioned.

'Look here, Shorthouse,' the captain began, 'I've just had a visit from Parson Heathcote. He tells me that the hares and rabbits have been doing a lot of mischief to your crops.'

‘ Does he, by Jingo ? ’ retorted the farmer, bull-necked and bull-dog visaged.

‘ I’m going to put a stop to that.’

‘ Time you did,’ said Shorthouse.

‘ I’ll have a rabbit-proof fence run round the Barton farm as soon as possible, and, in the meantime, if you’ve any claim for compensation, send it in. I’ll undertake that my father shall consider it.’

‘ That’s all right,’ the farmer answered sulkily. He was not going to be conciliated all in a minute. ‘ You’ve got yourself pretty well disliked, you have ; and don’t you think as it’s the hares and the rabbits as has done it all, because it ain’t.’

‘ I am afraid there have been mistakes, Shorthouse,’ the officer answered, doing his best to be amiable, ‘ but let us hope that it’s not too late to mend. We’ve no desire, you know, to live at enmity with our neighbours.’

‘ It’s a sight too late to mend,’ Shorthouse answered. ‘ Look here, sir, I’ve been waiting

for a chance to give thee a bit o' my mind, and now have at you. A passel o' jumped-up nobodies, comin' from the Lord knows whither, chivvyin' and bullyin' a country-side as my Lord Barfield himself'd never ha' dared to do. Theer, theer, I've said my say. Ride along, young man.'

Captain Mallard felt that he had a right to be angry. He had come out with the best intentions in the world, having swallowed the bitter pill the parson had presented to him, and digested it, as he hoped, with profit. And here was all set at naught by this insolent clown, who made nothing of his surrender, and refused his proffered amity.

'I came here,' he said, 'to make you a free offer of compensation. I withdraw that offer, and I wish you good day.'

'Compensate!' the farmer bawled after him. 'Goo an' compensate young Tom Barton. That old fox of a father o' yours murdered his'n. Goo and try your compensation on him!'

The captain rode on gloomily. His mission had had poorish results so far. The head and front of the family offending was obviously the uprooting of the Bartons. He declined, and from his own point of view naturally declined, to lend a moment's credence to the idea that old Barton's death had been caused or even hastened by his father's refusal to renew the lease. The sentiment which could make such a thing possible was outside Captain Mallard's scheme of things. That the man should have been annoyed was conceivable. That he should have been killed was not merely incredible but ridiculous. Yet, all the same, this young Barton was at the root of things, and before resigning himself altogether to despair, it might be well to make one effort towards conciliating him. Thinking thus, he lifted his eyes, and saw the man with whom his thoughts were busy a hundred yards away, and approaching him on horseback. He took a swift resolution, and rode forward, hailing the oncomer.

‘Mr. Barton! a word with you!’

Tom looked up at the call, but the sun was in his eyes, and for the moment he did not recognise the man who hailed him. He quickened his horse’s pace involuntarily, however, but almost in the act of doing so drew rein, and sat stock still.

‘I want a word with you, Barton,’ said Captain Mallard. ‘A serious word.’

‘You’d best not have it,’ Tom answered. ‘I’ve got no words to waste on you or yours.’

CHAPTER III

CAPTAIN MALLARD went home mightily incensed against the whole population of Heydon Hay. He was all the more angry because it had cost him a very real effort to apologise and to promise amendment. He had certainly been over-sanguine in supposing that the local hatred of his father could be soothed into friendship by a few pleasant words. And yet his honest and well-meant attempt merited more success than it had encountered. He was in no position to do justice to Barton's feelings, and contemptuously dismissed him from his mind as an ill-conditioned cub of a fellow with whom it was not worth while to concern himself. On Barton's side the mere fact that Mallard had presumed to address him at all seemed to convey a callous and

brutal insult. The lad mourned his father profoundly, and every day, as he rode about the country-side in pursuance of his various duties, the sight of the old house standing empty and desolate brought a sense of grief and desperation to his heart. The fields it had been his pride and delight to till were already beginning to present an aspect which was grievous to a practical farmer's eye.

After an undisturbed possession of so many years the land had seemed after a fashion to belong to his father, and he had looked forward to the lease as his assured inheritance. The loss of the farm was only half his grief, and when all was said about it, by far the least important to him. Under any circumstances he would have mourned his father's death, but if the old man had been carried away by any common illness, or had come to his end by any common disaster, he would have felt his loss less passionately. The act of tyranny which had killed him looked to the survivor's eyes altogether purposeless and

wanton. His blood boiled when he thought of it, and sometimes for an hour together he would brood on it with blazing eyes and clenched teeth, until he felt himself to be growing dangerous.

Nobody could charm him out of these silent rages but Mary Duffield; but they always yielded at a word from her. In respect to income, Tom was as well off as he had ever expected to be. He and Sir Ferdinand got on splendidly together. The new bailiff knew his work thoroughly, and went about it with an excellent, unfailing ardour. Sir Ferdinand was an appreciative employer, and the position had a very promising look of permanency. The wedding-day was fixed, the house to which the bride was to come home was furnished, and if the intending bridegroom had not been so constantly reminded of the wrong which had been done him, he would have been on the high road to complete happiness.

There was at least one professional poa-

cher in Heydon Hay, who was known to the local gamekeepers. Those functionaries had had a longing eye on him for years, but had never yet caught him *flagrante delicto*, or traced game from his hand to any market. If they had had the sympathy of the great non-poaching body, they might have proved scores of cases against him to the hilt. But in the rural mind just then there was a general sense that any man who chose to make war against constituted authority in that particular fashion fulfilled, in a way, a sort of public duty.

The people, in point of fact, were not in sympathy with the game laws, however leniently they might be construed by the best of landlords. Then there were half-a-dozen amateur young men who did a little poaching with extreme discretion, and at intervals, more for the fun and danger of the thing than for any meagre profit it might bring them, and their existence in the body politic helped to float the public sense of

antipathy to the law. Most people of the humbler sort thought poaching a perfectly fair game. The law was on the landlord's side, but the natural rights of the case were against him. A successful breach of the law set a feather in the cap of any daring youngster.

Tom, in his new position, had to set his face resolutely against all this, and did it, as he did the rest of his duties, thoroughly. As a mere lad he had himself been tempted into one or two after-dark expeditions, and was, therefore, perfectly well acquainted with the men engaged in them. He made it his business to call on them one by one, and to warn them from their pursuit.

‘You see,’ said Tom, ‘it wouldn’t be fair on me to make me give any of you chaps away. I know the whole lot of you, and all the tricks you’re up to. Set a thief to catch a thief. D’ye see? Now, you be warned, and don’t let me have any trouble with you.’

Tom Barton's candour kept Sir Ferdinand's birds from harm ; but the poaching element rejoiced in the prospect of sport on Mr. Stanley Mallard's overstocked preserves. Game was so plentiful that the wiring of a hare ceased to be an adventure worthy of the name, until one of the amateur tribe was caught red-handed by a keeper of Mallard's, and was sent to jail for six weeks from the Barfield Petty Sessions. The rest laid their heads together, and concocted a deed of open defiance, which led to serious and even dreadful consequences.

Castle Barfield had at this time a population of something like forty thousand, and amongst the working classes there were rollicking youngsters by the score who would have been willing to join in such an enterprise. A dozen or thereabouts were enlisted, and on one lovely night in autumn, when the harvest moon was at the full, they assembled at an appointed place. Every man had a gun, a powder-flask, a pocketful

of shot, an old newspaper for wadding, and a handful of percussion caps. Each one was further provided with a mask of black crape with a pair of eyeholes cut in it. They were sworn to defend themselves if attacked by the gamekeepers, and their object was to do as much damage to Mr. Stanley Mallard's preserves as possible without view to their own profit. The party numbered seventeen, and Mr. Mallard employed a keeper, an underkeeper, and a brace of human lurchers rising respectively nineteen and twenty. The marauders calculated, with some promise of success, on being able to overawe this feeble contingent, and entered on the business with a light heart. They had walked in from various points to their rendezvous, and thence marched boldly along the lane until they reached a five-barred gate, which led directly to the Barton Farm. This they climbed, and then, by their leader's orders, extended themselves in a line at measured intervals along the hedge. Then, at a given

signal, they advanced in line, potting right and left at anything that rose.

The light looked clear as day; but, as anybody who has tried moonlight shooting knows, this appearance is deceptive, and the amount of noise was prodigiously in excess of the execution done. The gamekeeper and his brace of lurchers heard it, and hurried to the spot. The underkeeper heard it, and rose from his modest pint of small ale at the King William. Captain Mallard heard it as he lounged about the garden with his after-dinner cigar, and, summoning coachman, groom, stable-helper, valet, and butler, ran in the direction of the field from which the firing came. Unluckily for himself, Tom Barton heard it also, and was nearest of them all. He was within a hundred yards when the first shot was fired, and heard the noisy shouting and laughter of the Barfield boys. The local poachers gave no tongue, knowing that they might be sworn to by their voices. Tom raced down the lane, vaulted the gate, and so

for the first time since his expulsion from it set foot on the farm on which he was born. He sent out a lusty ' Halloa, you there ! '

' Halloa, *you* there ! ' one of the strangers answered mockingly, supposing him to be landed proprietor or keeper.

Tom knew the voice for a stranger's, and suspected at once the nature and the purpose of the raid.

' This won't do, men,' said Tom, advancing.

' Keep thy distance,' said one, turning and levelling his gun in Tom's direction.

' Pooh, pooh ! ' said Tom, advancing. ' Don't be a fool. Put that thing down.'

' Keep thy distance,' said the man again. ' Bist warned. Come no nigher.'

Tom pressed on, and the reckless blackguard fired. The pellets went by harmlessly, with an unpleasant, stinging sound.

' I don't think anybody else is fool and scoundrel enough for that,' said Barton.

His blood was up, and he walked resolutely towards the man who had fired. The man, with the whites of his eyes gleaming oddly in the moonlight through his crape mask, dropped his gun and waited.

'Bodham,' said Tom, 'are you here? You here, Hargate? You here, Jones?'

There was no answer to these various queries, but the men drew gradually near each other.

'You needn't take the trouble to brain me, my friend,' said Tom, addressing the man who had fired, 'but this won't do. If there are any Heydon Hay men here, and I suppose there are, they know me. I mean no harm to any of you, but this won't do.'

One of the Heydon Hay squadron had whispered a Barfield man that this was Mr. Barton, Sir Ferdinand's bailiff, a rare good chap who meant no harm to anybody, and the man whose father had been ejected from the Barton Farm.

‘Mr. Barton,’ said the man thus primed, speaking civilly enough, ‘you’re the last man in the world as should want to stop us.’

‘It won’t do, men,’ said Tom, staunchly. ‘You’ll only get yourselves into trouble.’

‘Shall we?’ said a third. ‘Here’s for it, then.’ He banged at a hare which raced across the field at that moment. The frightened creature veered, and tacked hither and thither amid a perfect fusillade of shots, and finally escaped unhurt amid wild laughters and whoopings. Suddenly someone cried, ‘Ware keepers!’ and seven or eight men were seen closing in about them at racing pace on every side. The poachers, at a pre-concerted signal, formed into a ring, shoulder to shoulder, and faced the oncoming foe. Their eyeballs gleamed white and threatening through the masks of crape, and the advancing enemy seeing them thus massed together fell into a walk, and even lagged a little in that. There was one exception. Captain Mallard, armed with nothing but a riding

whip, marched erect and indignant towards the ring.

‘Put down your guns,’ he cried. ‘There is plenty of help behind.’

‘Better come no further,’ cried one of the men in the circle, levelling his gun. ‘Stop wheer you be if you set a value o’ your life.’

As it happened, the threatening gun was empty. The man behind it knew that, but Captain Mallard did not. That made no difference. He was brave even to rashness, and gave evidence of that fact on many historical fields in later years, and with right on his side he was ready to face anything. He walked straight on, and suddenly caught sight of Barton, recognising him clearly in the broad moonlight. He made a sudden dart at him, and seized him by the collar before Tom could raise a hand in resistance.

‘You’re here, are you?’ he exclaimed, driving his knuckles into Barton’s throat. He was a stalwart fellow, and his excitement ending him unusual strength, he forced Tom

for a moment almost to his knees. There was no chance for explanation, and Tom, thus unreasoningly assailed, was scarcely in the humour for it had it been possible. He recovered himself after the first surprise, and grappled with his adversary. He was at a serious disadvantage to begin with, but was both solider in mould and wirier than Mallard, and in a little while matters were more than equalised. He was free, and had his hands in posture to defend himself. The young officer went madly at him, and was met by a well-directed blow which sent him staggering backwards. He came on again with a rush, and got once more to close quarters, but Tom was an expert wrestler, and threw him. He fell heavily, and at that instant a shot rang out and a heavy charge struck him in the hip.

‘I’m shot !’ screamed Mallard. He strove in vain to rise, and shook a threatening fist at Barton. ‘You shall hang for this, you blackguard murderer.’

Who fired the shot, whether it was discharged in mere nervousness, by accident, or in any scuffle between gamekeeper and poacher, was never known, but the cry of pain and the threat were enough for the silly rabble whose folly had brought about the disaster. They fled in all directions, and the keepers and their assistants pursued in vain. Two well-intentioned men, the groom and coachman, knowing no more than that their master's voice had denounced Barton, seized on him and held him.

'You needn't trouble, my men,' said he, suddenly sobered by the catastrophe. 'I'm no more answerable for this than you are. I've nothing to run away from, and your best business is to help your master.'

They held him still, but, calling lustily for help, brought certain stragglers from the chase. Others, who heard the firing from a distance, came dribbling on to the scene of action, and by-and-bye the gate over which Tom had vaulted a little time before was

unslipped, a half-score of coats were thrown hastily upon it, and on the stretcher thus prepared, the wounded man, by this time barely conscious, was borne away.

Amongst the late arrivals was the village constable, to whose charge Tom was confided.

‘The captain’s shot,’ said the coachman, ‘and this is the man as done it.’

‘Me the man?’ cried Tom, indignant and amazed. ‘Why, we were wrestling together when the shot was fired. I had no gun in my hands. Any man on the ground can swear to that.’

‘I can swear different,’ said the groom. ‘I saw a gun in your hands when I came up.’

‘You saw a walking-stick, you fool,’ Tom answered. ‘My guns are both at home. You’ll find ’em there.’

‘Very sorry, sir,’ said the constable. ‘Bad business, Mr. Barton, but you’ll have to come along o’ me.’

‘Do you mean to tell me, Saunders,’ said

Tom, staring at him wonderingly, 'that you're going to take any notice of this mad story? I heard those fellows firing, as I suppose the rest of you did, and I came here to put a stop to it.'

'Very sorry, Mr. Barton,' said the constable, 'but——' he fumbled in his tail pockets and produced something that jingled and glittered in the moonlight.

'Don't try that on, Saunders,' said Tom, grimly. 'I won't have them on my wrists whilst there's life in my body. I'll go quietly anywhere. I won't have that. Come to Sir Ferdinand's. He'll put you fellows to the right-about pretty soon, I fancy.'

Groom and coachman were merely human, and they had long since taken sides. The side they took was the one on which they found their own bread buttered. The villagers had universally identified them with the unpopular household, and they had their own private sorenesses. Barton had spoken-loudly against Mr. Stanley Mallard a hundred-

times, and the fact of personal feud was plain as the sun at midday. The men laughed jeeringly at Barton's statement of the reason of his presence on the scene, and the young fellow, exasperated and wonder-stricken, found himself marched along by the two like a malefactor. A plain word with Sir Ferdinand would put all right, however, and recollecting how important it was to himself that he should control his temper, he held his tongue, and fought his inward rebellious forces down.

Sir Ferdinand's house was a good three miles away. Barton's captors talked to each other and to the constable as they walked ; and, to his consternation, he gathered their belief that it was he who had assaulted Captain Mallard, and not Captain Mallard who had assaulted him. If the captain were a true man at all he himself would put that matter straight ; but it was awkward for the moment, and he could see that the declaration of the two men might be stronger than his

own unsupported word, even with Sir Ferdinand.

Three-quarters of an hour brought them to the Hall, and the young footman, staring at the disordered bailiff, who was a personal crony of the butler's, and therefore a person to be held in respect and awe, informed them that his master was at that moment in the library.

‘Captain Mallard's been wounded,’ said the constable, rising to a sense of his own dignity and importance. ‘Mr. Barton's charged with it. Let Sir Ferdinand know as we're here, and what the business is.’

Sir Ferdinand admitted the party instantly, and Tom was allowed to tell his story. He told it coherently and simply, and his employer at once believed him.

‘I can't take upon myself to discharge you, Barton,’ he said finally. ‘The matter will have to be examined into before the Bench on Saturday. I don't think you will be put to any great trouble to clear yourself, but

in the meantime I must bind you over to appear.'

'Thank you, Sir Ferdinand,' answered Tom, 'I should like to be allowed to walk over and ask how the captain is. It was no fault of mine, but I should be sorry to think he'd come to mischief.'

'As soon as this business is over,' responded the baronet, 'I'll ride over to the Abbey and make inquiries. That will do, Saunders. This matter will be inquired into on Saturday.'

'Ain't I to lock him up, sir?' inquired the constable. The majesty of the law seemed affronted in his person.

'Certainly not,' replied Sir Ferdinand tartly, and the two withdrew. They complained bitterly at the King William of Sir Ferdinand's partiality; but one or two of the local cowards, who had been concerned in the affray, had ventured to slip in there and congratulated themselves on the news. They had their own necks to save: but it would

have been a pity if an innocent man should have suffered. None the less, it was an understood thing amongst them that it were wise to let sleeping dogs lie ; and that if Mr. Barton should happen to want a witness he must find him elsewhere than amongst their own number.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Petty Sessions at Castle Barfield were held upon a Saturday, and early upon the morning of that day Tom Barton presented himself at the Hall with an inquiry for his sweetheart. Mary was free of duty for the time being, and ran down eagerly to meet him. They were both quite confident and bright about the final issue of the charge, for Tom had told her the whole story, and it was as plain as daylight itself that he was innocent in the matter. All the same, there was a certain nervous flutter about the heart, and a little resentment on either side against the stupidity of the charge and the meddlesome folly of the people who had made it.

Rickards, the butler, had, on Tom's arrival, brought the young fellow into his

own pantry, and had then delicately retired. It was in the privacy of that apartment that the sweethearts met. Their wedding-day was fixed for only a week or two later, and when Mary entered she ran straight to Tom's arms as to her natural home.

‘I’m due at eleven, my dear,’ said Tom, ‘and I’ve given myself plenty of time to walk over. I’m told that mine won’t be the first case by two or three, but it’ll be pretty soon over, I reckon, and I’ll come round directly I get back again.’

‘I wish they could find the man who fired that wicked shot,’ said Mary. ‘Mr. Rickards said he got news from the captain’s own man late last night, and the poor young gentleman’s in a high fever.’

‘I’m sorry for him,’ Tom responded. ‘I won’t say I’ve any love or liking for him, but I never wished him harm. So far as punching his head goes, that might be looked on as another matter. Before he came to mischief I’d have done that with all the

readiness in life. But as for harming the man, or lifting up a deadly weapon against anybody——'

‘Why, of course, that’s nonsense,’ said Mary decidedly. ‘Nobody as knows you, Tom, would believe it for a minute.’

‘That’s a certainty,’ said Tom, ‘and here’s Sir Ferdinand ready to speak up for me, and, as he tells me, Lord Barfield himself, if there should be any need of it. I’m in no sort of danger, my dear, so don’t you fret about me. I shall come back here first thing and tell you all about it.’

‘Don’t you go on an empty stomach, Tom,’ said his sweetheart, who had a turn for things practical. ‘I never could abide that Barfield bread, a lot of baker-made stuff, all bone-dust and alum and rubbish ; and as for the butter, neither your mother nor mine would ever have turned such stuff out of a dairy. Take something with you, Tom, that’s fit for a Christian’s eating.’

‘I’m provided, my dear,’ Tom responded,

patting the pocket of his coat. 'I shan't faint by the way for want of provender. Good-bye, Mary, and don't you worry. There's as many as a dozen Heydon Hay folks going over. Any one of 'em will give me a lift home again. So far as that goes, any one of 'em would give me a lift to Barfield, but I shouldn't like to drive in with anybody until I'm cleared. It'll be different coming back again.'

He gave her a hearty hug and a kiss, and she returned his embrace with equal warmth and sincerity. She accompanied him to the door which led to the courtyard, and thence watched him as he strode manfully away, waving his walking-stick in circles, and obviously full of hope and spirit.

Mary went back to her pleasant labours and thought of Tom all day. Lady de Blacquaire liked to have her maid about her during her indoor hours, and whilst her ladyship wrote or read, or painted or embroidered, mistress and maid would keep silent com-

panionship for hours. They were seated thus together when Sir Ferdinand entered his wife's apartment dressed for driving.

'I am away to Castle Barfield, my dear,' said he, 'about that case of young Barton's.'

'Do you take your place on the Bench to-day?' the lady asked him.

'Not to-day,' he answered. 'I shall give evidence as to character, and I shall be able to say that Captain Mallard at least does not charge Barton with having fired at him. He told me on the night of the disaster that for anything he could say to the contrary the shot might have been fired by another hand. Heathcote told me last night,' he added, 'that the elder man is back here. A solicitor has been engaged, it appears, and they are moving heaven and earth for witnesses. Mallard is seriously embittered, which is in itself of course quite natural. He blames his victim for having suffered under him, and is determined to punish him for it if he can.'

'Captain Mallard is worse this morning,' said her ladyship.

'Only slightly,' Sir Ferdinand answered. 'He is feverish, light-headed at times, but the doctors anticipate no danger. I must go now. I shall be back at three o'clock or thereabouts.'

Mary, steadfastly sewing in the background, listened to this conversation, but caught no fear from it. Tom's innocence was perfectly established in her mind, and not only was that so, but Sir Ferdinand was going to speak for him. She was not acquainted with the *personnel* of the Barfield bench, but she knew that none of his fellow-magistrates were on the same social level with the husband of her mistress, and from her earliest days she had been accustomed to understand that whatever young Mr. Ferdinand wanted was to be done. He was no more an autocrat now than he had been before the splendours of the baronetcy lighted upon him, and to her simple rustic

mind he was a sort of Lord Paramount, before whose will the wishes and opinions of other men must necessarily give way. She was naturally a shrewd creature in spite of these fancies. The belief in Sir Ferdinand's environment she had been born into, and in the refuge of his good opinion she felt that Tom was safe from harm.

As the day wore on she felt curious and eager to know how things were going. The faintest touch of anxiety made itself felt through her suppressed impatience—just the faintest little touch in the world, and no more. Towards mid-afternoon the hours began to drag wofully, and after four o'clock a minute was like an hour. One or two guests were staying in the house, and during their presence there the time of dinner had been made later by an hour than usual. In spite of that fact, Mary was busy with her mistress's toilet, and there was no news either of Tom or of Sir Ferdinand. Three o'clock was the time the baronet had ap-

pointed for his probable return, and now seven was approaching. Suspense began to tell upon her nerve.

'Sir Ferdinand will be late for dinner,' said her ladyship. 'He is not returned yet, or we should have heard the dogcart.'

At that moment a rap sounded at the door, and the baronet entered. He was gloomy and out of temper, and his face immediately betrayed the fact.

'I have known a fool or two in my time,' he began, wrathfully pulling off his gloves. 'I have seen a blatant, self-opinionated ass upon the bench before to-day, but never until to-day have I seen a whole half-dozen assembled in conclave together.'

'Ferdinand,' said her ladyship, rising and advancing hurriedly towards him, 'what has happened? You alarm Mary,' she added, in a soft whisper. 'Remember the child's feelings.'

'My good girl,' said Sir Ferdinand, 'you need be under no apprehension about Barton. Barton will come out all right.'

‘Is he safe, Sir Ferdinand?’ she asked, fighting for self-possession. The baronet’s words and manner frightened her, though what she feared she knew not. Tom was innocent, and Sir Ferdinand was on his side. What could there be to alarm her?

‘Is he safe?’ the baronet repeated almost pettishly. ‘Oh, he’s safe! But upon my word, Felicia, those addle-headed dullards have committed him to take his trial.’

‘To take his trial!’ said her ladyship; ‘but that is serious, Ferdinand.’

‘Serious?’ returned her husband. ‘No. It’s awkward, it’s uncomfortable, it’s stupid; but it’s not serious for anybody or for anything except the reputation of the men who did it. Barton’s innocence, my dear, is as clear as noonday.’

‘Sit down, child,’ said her ladyship kindly. ‘You are looking ill.’ Mary’s fresh, clear country colour had all flown from her comely cheeks, and her eyes were wide open with a sudden terror. Her clasped hands trembled

before her, and she sank into the seat her mistress hurriedly brought her. 'You must not give way; Sir Ferdinand will tell you everything that has happened.'

Lady de Blacquaire and Mary Duffield were not mere mistress and maid. The girl had been more or less about her ladyship's person from childhood, and there was a simple and sincere attachment on both sides.

'Thank you, my lady,' said Mary, and with clasped hands, pale face, and distended eyes, awaited explanation. Sir Ferdinand, holding both riding gloves in one hand, struck them at measured intervals against the palm of the other, and stood for a moment angry and ill at ease.

'I told you,' he began by-and-bye, 'that I shouldn't take my seat on the bench. I sat in the well of the court. There were half-a-dozen of the solemn old fossils. Beasley, and Brown, and Jordan you have met already; you know their mental calibre. The other three were deafer, stupider, balder, and, if

possible, more addle-headed. Mallard was there. The people hooted him, and he came into court very white and savage. He has employed a Birmingham solicitor, a very shrewd, hard-headed fellow, who has done his best to get up a case for him.'

'But what can they prove?' asked her ladyship, with a sidelong glance at Mary's frightened face.

'Well, my dear,' returned Sir Ferdinand, with evident reluctance, which he strove to disguise by an added pettishness of manner, 'they seem to think that they have proved something. They have raked the parish for witnesses, to show that Barton was incensed against Mallard senior, and that he used threats against him.'

'But did they prove that?'

'Well, yes,' said Sir Ferdinand; 'they proved that Barton was angry, and that he said one or two rash and foolish things. I scrawled a little note to him, and tried to guide him as to the lines on which he should

cross-examine these adverse witnesses. He stood up like a man, kept his head admirably, and got at the whole story. The people were packed in court like herrings in a barrel, and once or twice they applauded his questions, until the bench threatened to clear the court. The witnesses, you see, my dear, were all exceedingly favourable to Barton, and that made matters worse if anything. They were friends of his, and sided with him, and yet they couldn't avoid admitting that Barton had used threats.'

‘I’m sure, Sir Ferdinand,’ said Mary, fear and anxiety getting the better of the awe with which her thoughts generally surrounded him, ‘I’m sure he wouldn’t hurt a fly.’

‘My dear, good child,’ Sir Ferdinand responded, with an increase of fretfulness in his tone, ‘I’ve known the man from his childhood, and I don’t know a better fellow anywhere.’

‘Thank you, Sir Ferdinand,’ said Mary ; and what with the pride awakened by this

declaration and the emotion which had affected her already, she began to cry a little.

‘But tell us, Ferdinand,’ said her ladyship, ‘how they came to commit him. It was Captain Mallard who was shot. Had Barton ever threatened *him*? ’

‘No,’ said the baronet. ‘There was no proof of that. No attempt to prove it. The contention is, you see, that Barton was on the ground for an unlawful purpose. Mallard’s solicitor argued that the probabilities were that Barton had got the gang together for Mallard’s annoyance, and that, being engaged in an unlawful act, he was *particeps criminis*, whether he fired the shot or not.’

‘But is that the law?’ her ladyship asked. ‘Can one man be punished for the act of another?’

‘Most assuredly he can,’ her husband answered, ‘if it can be proved that his action contributed to the commission of the crime.’

‘There were a score of them,’ said her ladyship, ‘so the story goes, and all with

blackened faces. Barton had no witnesses, I suppose?'

‘None, except witnesses to character. Heathcote spoke out well, and I did my best. Mallard’s lawyer put it that the territorial influence was against his client. He went in, hot and strong, for local prejudice against Mallard, and did his best to discount the evidence in Barton’s favour. He’s a low fellow, the lawyer, a vulgar fellow, but as keen as a needle. Two men, Mallard’s groom and coachman, swore that Barton assailed Captain Mallard. They were cross-examined, and very ably cross-examined too, but they remained unshaken. Where the shot came from they could not tell, for at the moment they themselves were at actual fisticuffs ; but they swore that Barton had a gun in his hand, and that when it was picked up at his feet both barrels were empty.’

‘But what has become of the poor fellow?’ asked her ladyship.

‘Oh !’ said Sir Ferdinand, ‘he’s at home

by this time. I instructed Barton to ask for bail, but at first the bench refused it. I stood up at that,' he added, kindling into wrath as he spoke, ' and gave them a piece of my mind. I told them that Heathcote and I were prepared to offer bail to any amount. We had something of a tussle about it, but at last I forced them to it, and Heathcote and I became bail for five hundred pounds apiece.'

'Thank you, Sir Ferdinand,' said Mary, whose tears were falling fast by this time.

'You need have no fear, child,' he answered, coughing to clear his throat, and making his University drawl a little stronger than usual. 'Barton will be well looked after. I should have been here two or three hours ago, Felicia, but I was determined to see the thing in train at once. I put Barton into the dogcart, drove him into Birmingham, and found a smart criminal lawyer. We talked the matter over with him, and then drove to Beacon Hargate,

taking the lawyer with us. I was introduced there to a tremendously smart fellow, a barrister, Denton by name. He's staying with the Conroys, and he will take up the case when it comes to the assizes. So far, everything has been done that can be done.'

' You see, Mary, that you need be under no alarm,' said her ladyship, ' and you may be sure that in Sir Ferdinand's hands everything will be safe.'

' I know that, my lady,' returned the maid, and, indeed, her faith in Sir Ferdinand was absolute. But for all that this news had shaken her, and she could not yet restrain her tears.

' You may leave me now, child,' said her mistress, gently.

Mary obeyed, and Lady de Blacquaire turned to her husband.

' Now, tell me, Ferdinand ; your manner is not altogether reassuring. You are certain that Barton is in no danger ? '

' To tell you the absolute truth, my dear,'

he answered, 'I am certain of no such thing. I have seen how half-a-dozen average, well-meaning men can look at the case. They are stupid people, but they are trying honestly to do their duty, and to their minds the business is a black one. That is only too evident. I am in hope that a judge and jury may take a different view, and I am certain that if they do not, an innocent man will suffer.'

'But do you know, dear,' said her ladyship, 'Mary and that poor fellow are engaged to be married? The banns will be published for the second time to-morrow. Is he in any danger? They should be advised to postpone the wedding.'

'Let us look,' said Sir Ferdinand, 'at the affair as it presents itself to people who don't know the prisoner. He hates the Mallards, and has reason to hate them. They have done him a great and unprovoked injury, and the whole country-side knows as much. Under these circumstances he is found in the company of a crowd of ruffians with vizored

faces who are engaged in open breach of the law, obviously for Mallard's annoyance. Then it is sworn that on young Mallard's arrival the prisoner at once assaults him. Then it is known that Mallard is shot, and it is proved that the gun the prisoner held in his hand had been at least recently fired.'

Her ladyship's face clouded under all this, and her husband added dejectedly a moment later :—

‘It’s a troublesome business, my dear, and I wish we were well through with it.’

‘I trust we may be,’ returned her ladyship; ‘but you are late already, Ferdinand. You have only ten minutes left to dress in.’

CHAPTER V

THERE was an autumn mist abroad that Saturday night. It was chill and heavy, and it bore with it the first suggestion of coming winter. In the village street the windows, lit never so brightly from within by fire and candle, shone with a pale, blurred gleam to the wayfarer who took the footpath, whilst from the opposite side of the road they were almost invisible. The trees and hedges dripped with moisture, and the air was full of heavily-laden gossamer. The smith's forge, unexpectedly open for some job of shoeing, sent out a glow of light a yard or two into the gloomy weather, and the tinkle of hammer and anvil sounded subdued and dull. But, the forge once passed, the fog settled down

into deep darkness, and a sudden coldness and loneliness fell on a blank world.

Tom Barton carried a lanthorn, and by its light could just manage to keep the middle of the road. The tink-a-tink-tink of the forge died into silence behind him. The little circle of light went dancing along with him, revealing the well-worn ruts of the road and striking fire on the shallow pools of rain, but, revealing no more than these things, gave him a curious feeling of obstructed effort—a sense of arrest in motion—as if his swift footsteps made no progress. Once or twice, to dispel this feeling, he walked nearer to the hedgerow on one side or the other, so that he might at least see the boughs as he passed them; but the going was uneasy except in the middle of the road, and he finally resigned himself to the blindfold night, and tried to think no more about it.

He was not in the least an imaginative man, and, apart from that, he was native born and rustic bred, and was used to being out in

all sorts of weather. Conditions of climate were as little likely to have an emotional effect on him as on any man alive, and yet somehow the night seemed like his mental state, and made him comfortless. The fog about him made an apt figure for the shutting in of his mental prospect, though it was infinitely the less dreary of the two. He knew in what direction his actual footsteps led him, but the fog of circumstance was thicker than the dense autumn mist he walked in, and it seemed to have fallen around him in a strange country.

A great deal has been said and written about that supporting sense of innocence which is supposed to lend strength and confidence to the unjustly accused. For the most part it is sad nonsense, and at its best is only true, or partly true, of one individual here and there who happens to be blest with an uncommon temper. Tom Barton felt under unjust suspicion pretty much what you and I would feel, and his sensations were mainly

compounded of bewilderment and indignation. To begin with, he was innocent, and how in the name of all that was wonderful that fact should not be transparent to everybody who heard his story he could not understand. For a minute at a time his anger warmed him. But then came a dreadful fear. Suppose that a judge and a jury were as stupid as a bench of magistrates? For Tom was not learned in the law, and to him a committal to trial looked seriously like a conviction. There had been moments in the course of that afternoon and evening which had been altogether bitter to him.

He made his way to the great house, and, entering the kitchen there, was received with marked distinction. The household naturally took its tone from Sir Ferdinand, and Tom was a martyr and a hero. Had he walked among the household at the Abbey he would have encountered a different reception, for there the tone was taken from Mr. Stanley Mallard, in whose eyes Tom was a desperate

scoundrel, a fomenter of sedition and disturbance. The great political game is played the wide world over in matters that have no association with politics. Facts remain unchanged, but opinions are as opposite as the poles. People see what it is their duty to see, or their inclination. The man of no prejudice is a Sadducee.

Tom was a little grim and quiet, and declined to say much in answer to the questions and speculations of Sir Ferdinand's domestics. He asked for Miss Duffield, and his friend Mr. Rickards, the butler, once more surrendered his pantry, to allow of the lovers' colloquy being held in private.

'I'd hoped to bring you better news, my dear,' said Tom, when the girl came down to join him. She had gathered courage from Sir Ferdinand's assertion of her sweetheart's safety, and met him with composure.

'It'll all come right, Tom,' she answered.

'I hope it may,' said Tom, 'and I believe it will, but all the same I've something serious

to say, and maybe something serious to do. I want to talk about it.'

'Sit down, Tom. We shan't be disturbed here. What is it?'

'Now, don't let me frighten you, darling,' he answered. 'But look here.' He stared at the fire for a little while, his head drooping, and his whole manner indicating uncertainty. Suddenly he looked her in the face, and took both her hands in his. 'Suppose it shouldn't come all right, Mary?'

'Tom,' she cried, 'you mustn't talk like that.'

'My dear,' said Tom, 'I've got to talk like that. I must. We've got to look things in the face. Things look darker than I thought they did. I'm not afraid, but suppose—"

'I shan't suppose anythin' of the sort,' said Mary. 'Nobody's goin' to disgrace an innocent man at this time o' day in England. I won't believe in it. I won't listen to it.'

'I thought,' said Tom, 'that I had only got to go into court, and tell a plain tale, to be set free again. I find it isn't so.'

She threw herself impetuously upon his breast, and he put both arms around her.

'I don't say I'm afraid, my darlin'. I don't want to frighten you. I wouldn't for the world. But I've come up to have a talk with you about it, and it's my plain duty to put matters straight before you. You know, Mary——' He paused for a moment, and then went on again with a voice which, in spite of his best efforts, was not altogether steady. 'We was cried in church last Sunday.' She pressed a little closer to him and kissed his weather-beaten cheek. 'We are to be cried again to-morrow. That mustn't be.'

'Mustn't be?' she answered in a wounded voice. 'Mustn't be, Tom?' She drew herself from his embrace, and looked at him with a glance in which fear, affection, and reproach were all commingled. 'Why, my darlin',

there's nothin' happened to come betwixt you and me?'

He kissed her mournfully and tenderly.

'Look here, Mary; the day I'm cleared I'm yours. There's no occasion for you and me to talk about things. We understand one another. We belong to one another. I don't suppose you've any more doubt about me than I have about you. But till I'm cleared I can't ask you to marry me.'

'Now, Tom, dear,' she answered, coaxingly, 'don't you talk nonsense. It isn't like you, Tom.'

'But, my dear——'

'Do you think so mean of me, Tom, that I should want to turn my back on you because you're in a bit o' trouble?'

'No, my darlin', but I'm thinking what's my duty to you. You know I love you. You know I've been looking forward to this time for a year and a half and more. But I'd sooner give my body to be burned than I'd lead you into trouble, and—I'm not sure, my

dear. I'm not sure. It's wisest to wait. Believe me. It's a deal the wisest thing to do.'

'Now, Tom,' said the girl, laying a hand on either of his shoulders, and shaking him in her earnestness. 'Listen to me. If there's any danger of evil befallin' you, that's all the more reason why I shouldn't leave you.'

'Wait till I'm cleared, my dear,' said Tom.

'What for?' she asked him, in a manner almost defiant.

'Suppose I shouldn't happen to be cleared after all,' he answered. 'This is serious, Mary. I don't look for it. I can't believe that it'll happen; but there's the chance, and I've got to look at that.'

'Yes,' she said, quietly and firmly, still holding him by both shoulders, 'we've got to look at it. I should just follow you across the world, Tom. If you don't want me——'

'Mary!'

'Don't you see, Tom, that if there should

be anything in what you say, that it's all the more reason why we should get married now? Nothing is going to hurt you. You'll come out of it all as clear as daylight. But if you didn't that's no reason for our parting. I should never take it for a reason. We love one another'—she blushed a little, but she looked him none the less bravely in the eyes—‘and nothing's going to part us. If anything happened to you, and we weren't married beforehand, we should be parted. Why, Tom, dear, you're talking nonsense. You know you are.’

‘I think you're the bravest girl in the world,’ said Tom.

‘Nonsense!’ said the girl. ‘If I'm brave it's only because there's nothing to be afraid of.’

‘Suppose I was found guilty, Mary?’

‘You won't be,’ she returned. ‘You'll come out as clear as the day.’

‘But if I should be?’ he urged.

‘If you should be,’ she answered brightly,

and yet seriously, 'there'd be all the less reason for my turning away from you. Tom, dear,' she cried, clinging to him anew, and hiding her face upon his breast, 'don't you see that that's the one thing in the world as'd make me all the more determined to marry you beforehand? Do you think I'd let you go out into the world alone? D'ye think I'd wait at home till you came back again? No; I'd find some place to be near you. If they sent you to Botany Bay I'd follow you. Tell me you don't want me, and I've got a spirit of my own, and I can let you go. But not while I know you love me, Tom. Not while I know you'd break your heart without me, just as I should break my heart if you went away and left me.'

Her tears were falling silently, and when he stooped to kiss her he felt them on his lips and on her cheek.

'I can't think I'm in any real danger,' he said, 'but I thought it right to warn you.'

'I don't care about your warning,' she

answered, her voice unbroken by her tears, though they were running faster. 'When a girl gives her heart she doesn't take it back again. Whatever happens you're the same Tom to me. If you're going to be in trouble there's the more need that you should have somebody as you can trust in, somebody as you can be sure of, somebody as loves you. If ever you shouldn't like me any longer, tell me so, and I'll go away and never be a trouble to you.'

'That won't happen,' said Tom Barton, quietly. 'But suppose the worst should happen, wouldn't you be unhappier if we were tied together than you would be if I left you free?'

'No,' she answered; 'I should be wretched, Tom, dear. But if I was your lawful wedded wife I should know that you was innocent, and I should wait and be contented. Don't try to change me.'

The time was simple, and the folk amongst whom these two were bred were simple people.

There are some born in another sphere, and bred in another fashion, who might have felt so open an insistence wanting in maidenliness. But to those two the fact that they loved each other levelled all barriers of that sort, and the girl could dare to speak her heart. Her lover was the last man in the world to find fault with her plain avowal of the truth that she loved him, and claimed the right to cleave to him in pain and disgrace, if pain and disgrace should come.

‘If I’m not a lucky man all round,’ said Tom, ‘I’ve got my share of joy in thee. My brave little lass, th’art! No more talk of partin’, dear. Thee and me’s one for the rest of our lives. Give us a kiss and dry thine eyes, Mary.’

She obeyed him, and they clung together fondly. In that happy minute trouble looked impossible. Heaven would let no undeserved mischief fall on a heart so true and faithful. So each thought as they embraced, and as they each called down blessings on the other.

Butler Rickards tapped discreetly at the door, and waited until he was requested to enter. Mary made no effort to remove the traces of her tears, but faced him with her lashes still wet, and a face beaming with feeling and resolve.

‘Her ladyship’s heard you’re here, Barton,’ said Rickards, ‘and she has a word to say to you and Miss Duffield together. You’re to go up to her own budwer.’

This was a command not likely to be disregarded, and Tom, having polished his boots on the hall door-mat until the very soles of his feet were warm, followed Mary upstairs, and was introduced to her ladyship’s presence.

Lady de Blacquaire at this period was reckoned a remarkably handsome woman, and what with her brilliant attire, her bare arms and shoulders, and her flashing jewels, looked very much like a creature of another sphere to Barton.

‘I have sent for you,’ she began, ‘because

I wish to speak to you in Mary's interest. Do you think it wise to get married just at this time?'

The question came suddenly, and the young fellow had not had time to grow acclimatised to the unaccustomed aspect of the place and the splendour of the person who addressed him. Mary answered for him, speaking quietly, but with heightened colour, and at first with a little catching of the breath.

'That's the very thing, my lady, as we've been talking about. Tom wanted to prevent the banns from being cried to-morrow.'

There was a touch of protest in the tone, almost of indignation, which caused her ladyship to lift her eyebrows in some astonishment.

'And don't you think that wise under the circumstances?' she asked.

'No, my lady,' returned Mary. 'I didn't think of listening to it for a minute.'

Her speech and bearing were less homely

in her ladyship's presence than they had been when she and Tom were alone, but in spite of that change she wore the same air of simple sincerity.

'You are surely not in haste to run away from me, Mary?' said her ladyship.

'I'm in no hurry to be married, my lady,' the girl answered, with a certain mild, defensive dignity. 'If there was any reason for it I'd wait a year. But I shouldn't be doing my duty if I turned my back on Tom at this time of all others.'

Lady de Blacquaire was greatly troubled in her mind. She had more than a common liking for her pretty retainer, and Sir Ferdinand had alarmed her.

'I think it showed very good sense and very good feeling on your part, Barton, to make that proposal,' she said graciously. 'But you must let me speak to Mary alone. I see I shall not have to convince you.'

'Your ladyship,' said Tom, finding tongue for the first time, 'we've made our minds up.

I came here to ask her not to do it, but we've made our minds up.'

'I don't want to alarm you, Barton,' her ladyship returned, 'and I hope with all my heart that no mischief will happen to you. If I were not absolutely sure of your innocence I would never have allowed Mary to meet you this evening.' Her ladyship, perhaps, miscalculated her own influence in this matter. 'But you must think. If you do not succeed in clearing yourself, how cruel a thing it would be to marry just at present.'

'Your pardon, my lady!' said Tom. 'I thought so myself an hour ago; but now I know different. It'd be a crueler thing not to marry.'

'Leave us alone a little while,' said her ladyship. 'Wait outside.'

Tom retired, and Lady de Blacquaire set to work to convert her maid from the ways of romance to those of common sense and expediency. But the maid was firm as adamant, and had but one answer.

‘I shan’t give up my chance of helping to make him happy, my lady.’

Sir Ferdinand was summoned. He came; but he lent only a half-hearted advocacy to his wife’s cause. Mary stood firm, and was at length despairingly dismissed to rejoin her sweetheart.

‘I had never dreamed,’ said her ladyship, ‘that the girl could be so obstinate and self-willed.’

‘I wish,’ said Sir Ferdinand, fixing his eye-glass and arranging his cravat with unnecessary minuteness before a mirror, ‘I wish there were more of her pattern.’

‘My dear,’ said her ladyship, rising and laying a hand upon his shoulder.

‘It’s a fact,’ said Sir Ferdinand, with a more portentous drawl than common. ‘Your penetration has not deceived you. I think Tom Barton one of the luckiest men I know. And the girl—the girl’s a jewel.’

CHAPTER VI

So the banns were cried on the morrow, after all. They were repeated on the following Sunday, and a week later Tom Barton and Mary Duffield were made man and wife. There was derision at the Abbey; but elsewhere there was nothing but congratulation. There was such a scene at the wedding as Heydon Hay had never before witnessed. The church was packed, floor and gallery; the very organ loft was invaded, and the aisles were thronged. A bigger congregation than often assembled within the building hung about the churchyard during the ceremony, and when the bride and bridegroom emerged from the porch they were cheered with great heartiness.

Tom took his wife home, and the round

of life went on. The young married folks were as happy as they well could be, and in a little while the possibility of separation grew to look so monstrous that they began to put the event out of their calculations altogether. The fact of the danger which still overhung their happiness was made manifest once or twice by visits from the solicitor Sir Ferdinand had engaged for Tom's defence. On one occasion, which looked memorable at the time, and in the light of after-years grew to be vastly more noteworthy, the solicitor brought with him that Mr. Denton, barrister, of whom Sir Ferdinand had spoken to her ladyship.

The eminent jurist of later days was at this time a man of about forty. He was grizzled before his time, but his eye-brows were still intensely black, and his thin cheeks, dogged chin, and mobile upper lip had a blue bloom upon them which the closest application of the razor could never remove. He was brief of stature and spare of build,

and yet few people carried away the impression of his being a small man. It is a matter of difficulty for the average run of small men not to look cocky when they strive to be dignified ; but a very cool and impassive dignity was natural to Denton. His ordinary manner was marked by a languid assurance ; but he could flash into an extraordinary vehemence at times, and carried with him at such moments something of an electric faculty, whether they came to him in public or in private. He either bore a good deal of his forensic manner with him into common life, or took his common manner with him into court. A cold, listless urbanity overlay the dignity of his bearing, and but for his occasional flashes one might have supposed him to be the weariest man in the world.

Mr. Jackley, the solicitor, who had already come to be something of a familiar figure to Barton, brought the barrister to Heydon Hay on a sparkling winter morning

within a week of the sitting of the assize court. Barton had been apprised by letter of their coming, and at the appointed hour was ready to receive them.

‘Assuming you to be an innocent man, Mr. Barton,’ said the barrister, when the preliminaries of introduction were over, ‘it remains to establish your innocence. It is a lovely morning for a walk. Would you allow me to suggest that we should take a look at the locality, whilst you represent the precise nature of the matter to me?’

Tom assenting, the accused, the solicitor, and the barrister set out together. The locality was shown, and, leaning over the five-barred gate which Tom had vaulted on the most eventful night of his life, the two took in the surroundings, and Tom told his story. He was a plain and sober talker, but he had a faculty which sometimes comes of mere sincerity, and is rarely indeed found out of its company, of saying exactly what he wished to say, and of carrying, neat and undiluted,

an image from his own mind to the mind of his hearer.

Denton listened with his languid air, but once, and once only, his eyes met the narrator's with a flash of inquiry so keen and searching that Barton was more than assured of his attention. This was when Barton spoke of the black-vizored scoundrel who had fired upon him.

‘ You have no hope of finding a witness amongst the gang ? ’ asked Denton, appealing to the solicitor.

‘ None whatever,’ was the answer.

‘ You’re a married man, Mr. Barton ? ’ said Denton.

‘ Yes, sir,’ said Barton. ‘ I’m a married man.’

‘ Long married ? ’

‘ Seven weeks, come Wednesday.’

‘ Since your committal for trial, then ? ’ said Denton, drily.

‘ Yes, sir,’ Tom responded, ‘ that day fortnight.’

‘Of course,’ said Denton, ‘your wife was aware of your position?’

‘Of course,’ Tom answered, simply.

‘Had you either of you any idea that the position might be serious?’

‘Why, yes, sir. I went up to the Hall about it the night after petty sessions. The banns was going to be called for the second time next day. My wife was Lady de Blacquaire’s maid. I tried to persuade her out of going on with the marriage till the assize was over.’

‘You tried that, eh?’ said Denton, languidly, without looking at him.

‘Yes, sir,’ said Tom, ‘I tried my best. I know I was mistaken now, but at the time I thought it wasn’t the wisest thing to do. Her ladyship tried, and so did Sir Ferdinand.’

‘And how did your wife argue to convince you all?’ asked Denton.

‘Why, sir,’ said Tom, simply, ‘she put it this way. If nothing was going to happen there was no reason for altering our arrange-

ments, and if harm should befall me, she'd have a right to follow me. We should be tied together, don't you see, sir?'

'Was that Mrs. Barton who opened the door to me an hour ago?'

'Yes, sir,' said Tom. 'That was Mrs. Barton.'

'H'm,' said the barrister, and for the time being said no more. 'How about luncheon, Jackley?' he asked, a moment later.

'If you'll honour me, sir,' said Tom, 'dinner's ready at one o'clock, and I'm sure you're kindly welcome.'

'You are very good, Mr. Barton,' returned the barrister: 'we shall not put you about at all?'

'Not at all, sir.'

Tom was proud of Mrs. Barton's cooking, and was glad to have an opportunity of displaying its virtues to people of quality. He knew instinctively that Messrs. Denton and Jackley were not on the same social level, but to a plain-bred farmer like himself the

solicitor was a personage. The Republican ideas which prevail to-day were then the property of a few, and Tom Barton, at least, had no thought of upsetting social distinctions.

‘What with Mrs. Barton not being quite certain about my being home to the minute, as I generally [am,’ he says, ‘I may have to ask you to wait a bit, gentlemen; but if you don’t mind my going on ahead I’ll hurry matters up a bit.’

‘Thank you very much, Mr. Barton,’ said Denton, and Tom swung off ahead at a pace of six miles an hour.

‘Stalwart fellow that,’ said Denton.

‘A very fine fellow all round, I’m inclined to fancy,’ returned the solicitor.

‘Ye-es,’ said Denton, in his uninterested way. ‘Rather an unusual couple. Look at the woman’s face when we are at the table. Full of character, I thought it. So is the husband’s.’

‘Sir Ferdinand de Blacquaire,’ said the

solicitor, ' has the highest opinion of them both. Rather a pompous man, Sir Ferdinand. A little overbearing for his years, but kindly hearted. He defends this young fellow at his own cost, and is perfectly persuaded of the truth of his story.'

Mr. Jackley knew the way to Barton's house, and piloted his companion thither. There was no further talk between them.

Mrs. Barton and the trim little maid who was her only helper set out the table in the old-fashioned kitchen. The floor was composed of those large square tiles peculiar to the district, and the broad, low roof and sombre walls were panelled in old oak. The ceiling, in which a lover of old-world things would have delighted, had been grievously maltreated, and was studded with hooked nails, from which were suspended good store of canvas-clad hams and bacon and ropes of shining onions. The napery of the table was white as driven snow, and the glass and delf ware were polished to the last perfection.

tion of cleanliness. The best of home-brewed, a relic of the Barton Farm, sparkled on the board, and the convives ate and drank heartily and pleasantly together.

Denton, waking from his apparent apathy, told a story which threw his hearers into shouts of laughter, and proved himself a most delightful companion. He went silent after this, or nearly, for he devoted himself solely to drawing out his host and hostess, and watching without seeming to watch. Before the meal was fairly over there was no secret of their homely lives which he had not discovered, and, when he was gone, Tom and his wife wondered together that they should so have opened their hearts to a stranger. He knew the whole story of their courtship, he knew where they had first met together, how Tom had first approached his sweetheart, and what he had said to her on that eventful occasion, and what she had said to him. There were peals of laughter at simple jests and little touches of tenderness over simple re-

miniscences, and somehow these were all of Mr. Denton's making, though he took the smallest share in the conversation. He knew the whole story of the ejection from the farm, and out of Tom's blunt, yet vivid, narrative drew for himself a clear picture of the intruding Mallard and the uprooted farmer.

After the substantial mid-day dinner he smoked his cigar whilst his host took a pipe. Mary sat by the cheerful fireside knitting. The very dog, a tough collie of Tom's own breeding, notable for his reserve towards ordinary strangers, was on terms of intimacy with Denton before he rose to shake hands and take his way. We say nowadays, of Denton's like, that he has an electric or hypnotic faculty. At that time of day there were no words to describe his particular characteristic, but the man flourished none the less, and has flourished in every age and all societies. Wherever you find him he is the leader of men. Dignified, without apparent dignity; suasive, without apparent

suavity ; understanding, penetrating, enlisting immediate sympathy and confidence, learning all things, telling nothing. Mr. Denton was, indeed, in many respects a very remarkable man : and, though he drops necessarily out of this story for awhile, played a [very remarkable part in the moving story of Tom Barton's life. The reader is requested to keep an eye upon him.

Denton left the newly-married couple brightened and hopeful, without so much as having spoken a word of encouragement, and they continued bright and hopeful until the day of trial came. At the opening of the Assizes, Tom surrendered to his bail, and Mary went with him to the county town. The grand jury found a true bill, and the case was fixed for hearing on the Wednesday. Half Heydon Hay was in court. The Earl of Barfield, Sir Ferdinand, and Parson Heathcote sat on the bench, on the judge's left, and all nodded encouragingly to the prisoner as he took his place in the dock. Mr. Ire-

land, Q.C., a gentleman at that day eminent at the Bar, was for the prosecution. He was terribly keen and dangerous, but with his wig tilted forward over his forehead, wore the air of a weary parrot, half-asleep upon his perch. Denton sat opposite in the well, alert from head to foot, his airs of languor all dissipated ; his lean face and gleaming coal-black eyes looked masterly under the forensic wig, and Mary, who watched him with a fluttering heart, felt safe in his hands. Mr. Justice Wormould was on the bench, and a mere three minutes back had sent a lowly housebreaker to penal servitude for life. Somebody had whispered in Mary's hearing that Wormould was fond of heavy sentences, and this chance phrase sent her into a tremor of anxiety. Her face went white as chalk, and her hands, though she clasped them tightly, trembled. She dared scarcely raise her eyes to Tom's face, but when she ventured to steal a look at him his aspect helped her to compose herself.

He was a trifle pale, to be sure, and there was a glitter in his eyes which she had not seen there before ; but he bore himself like a man, and to her mind at least his face and bearing should have cried Innocence audibly to all the Court.

The case began, and Captain Mallard was the first witness. He spoke clearly, and with no perceptible animus : but under Mr. Ireland's leading he stated that the prisoner had assaulted him. Denton assailed him on this point alone, and there shook his testimony. The struggle between them might have come about as the result of a simultaneous grapple. It might even have been begun by himself. He confessed to having been angry and excited, and admitted that he had asked for no explanation. There was a point gained, and Mary breathed more freely. The groom and coachman were less ductile to Denton's touch, and each swore positively that the prisoner had assaulted Captain Mallard. They were quite unshak-

able on this point, and, to do them justice, were honest in their testimony. Mary's heart sank again, and, though in the main she was as little prone to think evil as any person within those walls, she thought then and always that the men were perjured. She knew every detail of Tom's story, and believed it with absolute and unquestioning faith.

There were a dozen unwilling witnesses to the fact that Tom had spoken in angry and opprobrious terms of Mr. Stanley Mallard ; but none of them could prove animus on his part against the younger man. The theory sought to be established by the prosecution was plausible enough. There had been a bitter quarrel between the incomers at the Abbey and the outgoers at Barton Farm. The prisoner had hired a gang of masked depredators to commit an open outrage in Mallard's preserves. One of the hired, or otherwise invited, crowd had murderously fired on Captain Mallard. For this

act, since it was the direct outcome of the prisoner's conduct, he must be held legally as responsible as if he himself had discharged the gun. That, Mr. Ireland told the jury, was the plain legal statement of the case, and would be confirmed by his lordship.

Denton's address was powerful, and in the course of its delivery Mary saw Tom triumphantly acquitted. No quarrel between Captain Mallard and the prisoner had been so much as hinted at. Denton deplored the fact that the prisoner's mouth was closed, and that he was forbidden to offer a plain statement in his own defence. He himself told the tale, but could see one or two of the members of the jury smiling at it. He felt his weakness there, and knew where the strength of his case lay. He pictured his client, a young man universally respected, newly married to the heroic and devoted girl who had refused credence to a story which gave the lie to her lover's whole history, and he promised the jury such witnesses to

character as were rarely seen in a court of criminal procedure. He played all the forensic wiles, pouring vials of contempt on the scheme of the prosecution, which was unsupported by a single fact apart from the prisoner's presence on the ground. He painted a moving picture of domestic happiness for ever ruined, a devoted, a heart-broken, and a blameless wife stained with the hand of infamy. He held the jury there, and there was not a man amongst them who would not have said 'Not Guilty' whilst the echoes of that persuasive eloquence still lingered in his ears.

Then came the witnesses to character. The testy old nobleman, with his ferret features and close-cropped head of reddish-grey, pooh-poohed in his own pettishly imperious fashion the mere idea of the prisoner's guilt.

' You have known him all his life, I think? ' asked Denton.

' I have known him since he was a week

old,' said his lordship, snapping and twinkling, ' and I may take leave to tell the Court that I don't know a worthier fellow in his station anywhere.'

' Thank you, my lord. I need trouble you no further.'

Then came Sir Ferdinand, equally emphatic, and then came Parson Heathcote.

' You officiated at the prisoner's marriage eight weeks ago, Doctor Heathcote? '

' Yes.'

' You have known him long? '

' From his infancy.'

' Had you had even a suspicion of his guilt in this matter, would you have consented to officiate at his wedding? '

' Assuredly not.'

' You have known the prisoner's wife from infancy, I believe? '

' That is so,' returned Heathcote, seizing at the opportunity, ' and I know her to be worthy of her husband. A most excellent and virtuous young woman.'

Parson Heathcote spoke as warmly in the prisoner's favour as his two predecessors, and there the case closed. Ireland declined to reply on the defence, and the judge summed up: violent antipathy—open trespass—actual violence on the part of the prisoner. Those were the heads of his discourse. His monotonous, dry voice fell on Mary's heart like the taps of a hammer. The summing up was dead against the prisoner, and Heydon Hay, stolidly assembled in the galleries, sat with open mouths and stared. The jury retired for a minute or two only, but the pause seemed dreadful and ominous. They returned with a verdict of 'Guilty,' and a strong recommendation to mercy. But Mr. Justice Wormould was not in a merciful humour. The sentence he delivered was one of seven years' penal servitude beyond the seas.

'But, my lord,' shrieked Mary, rising in her place, 'he's innocent! Indeed, indeed, my lord, he's innocent!'

‘Shame !’ said one gruff voice in the gallery, in the long-drawn midland accent, and all Heydon Hay there assembled took up the cry.

‘Clear the court,’ said Mr. Justice Wor-mould.

CHAPTER VII

NUMBER 212 toiled, mattock in hand, under a blistering sun. Thirty and nine fellow-convicts toiled about him with pick and spade. A forest of eucalypt closed in the band on all sides save where, in front and rear, a straight clear track, some eighteen feet in width, had been newly cut through its hitherto pathless solitudes. In the rear, the track was of bare brown earth ; in the front it was marked for a mile by the stumps of felled trees. Where the convict gang was now working the land undulated gently upwards, and the road was treched deep in the earth. The men sweated doggedly at their task. A warder overhead sat upon a tree-stump, smoking a well-blacked clay and nursing a rifle on his knees. He looked with a lazy want of interest

at the men below him, and blinked now and again in the sleepy sunlight. Two comrades, habited like himself, and each, like himself, armed with a rifle, lounged in rear of the gang, and occasionally exchanged a languid word or two. A labour-master, carrying a thick rattan, sat and watched the toilers, and now and again gave an order, which was never issued without a curse to emphasize authority. Here and there he emphasized authority by a stinging cut of the rattan ; but the weather was altogether too idle for such exercise, and for the most part the members of the gang were allowed to work in such peace as they could command. It is quite possible that, years ago, well clothed, and accepted members of a civilised community, they might have passed muster in comparison with any average crowd of their own numbers ; but as they bent to their task there, close-cropped and in prison garb, with the history of many months of bestial tyranny behind them, they seemed degraded from the human standard.

Whatever distaste for labour might animate his fellows, Number 212 went at the task before him with a will. He seemed to put the whole energy of his body into every stroke of the mattock. He might, indeed, judging from the fever with which he worked, have been wreaking a hoarded vengeance on something he hated.

‘Two-one-two,’ said the labour-master, ‘keep your temper.’

Number 212 said nothing. He had been there but a week or two, but he had seen enough to teach him that silence and implicit obedience to every whim of the petty tyrant who commanded were his best resource. Even these had not availed him always, and his heart was in a constant riot of wrath and anguish. He recalled this now, as he had done a thousand times before, and went on with his work in a quieter fashion.

A mounted man came slowly riding along the new-made road with a rifle slung over his shoulder. He paused to pass the time of day

with the two warders, and then moved on to the labour-master, to whom he handed a folded slip of paper, drawn from between the breast buttons of his tunic.

'All right,' said the man, having glanced at it. 'Two-one-two, you're wanted.'

Number 212 let fall his mattock, and turned, wiping the perspiration from his brow with the back of his sun-tanned hand.

'March in front,' said the man on horseback. 'This is a new hand, ain't he, Jackson?'

'Yes,' said the man addressed, stuffing the message he had received into a trousers pocket. 'We've had him a week or two.'

'That's all right,' said the mounted man. 'Then it's only fair to tell him what he's got to expect if he tries to get away. Look here, you! March in front, and keep the middle of the road. Make a move to one side of the track or the other, and I shall have to put a bullet into you. You understand that, eh? Very well, then. Jim along.'

He was a good-looking fellow, and his tone was by no means so truculent as his speech. He even seemed to find a touch of humour in the situation, for, as he drew over his head the band from which his rifle was suspended, he laughed quite genially.

Number 212, without question or remark, obeyed instructions, and the man on horseback followed, nursing his weapon on the bow of his saddle, and now and again breaking into a tuneful whistle. The convict plodded on doggedly, with bent head, and looked neither to the right nor to the left.

A quarter of an hour brought him and his armed escort out of the bush and in sight of the summer sea, which glittered like one huge sapphire. To the right rose a mountain, and at its foot, half a mile away, was clustered a small congregation of houses, most of which were of insignificant proportions. One building, however, was of considerable size, a gloomy, frowning barrack, and another, not

far removed from it, had some pretension to style.

'Government House,' said the escort, laconically, and the convict, obeying this brief injunction, went on still with bent head across the open ground. A sentry paced to and fro before the building they approached, and, as they drew near, a gentleman, followed by a mounted escort of half-a-dozen, rode up to the door, and was saluted by the sentry. The man in charge of No. 212 drew himself up in the saddle and saluted also.

'This is the man, sir,' he said, indicating his charge.

The gentleman thus addressed bent a scrutinising look on the convict, but No. 212 still drooped his dogged head, and kept his eyes fixed upon the ground.

'Take him into the hall,' said the Governor, 'and bring him to me when I ring.'

The escort dismounted, hitched his horse to the white-painted palisade, and ushered his charge into the vestibule of the house. The

Governor passed them a minute later with another keen look at the convict, and entered a side room. After a pause of about ten minutes, a table gong sounded sharply, and with an imperious note.

‘That’s for you,’ said the escort. ‘Come along.’

They entered, and saw the Governor seated at a desk overspread with papers. He had put on a pair of gold-rimmed glasses for reading, but laid them aside as the two men confronted him.

‘You may come back again when I call you,’ he said, addressing the escort.

The man left the room, and closed the door behind him.

‘Your name?’ said the Governor.

‘Thomas Barton.’

The Governor, toying with his grizzled moustache, surveyed him in silence for a moment.

‘What is the term of your sentence?’

‘Seven years.’

‘How long to run?’

‘Over five.’

‘Poaching affray, I think?’

‘That was the charge, sir.’

‘You protest your innocence, I believe?’

‘I do, sir.’

The convict raised his head for the first time, and looked his questioner firmly in the face. As he stood thus erect, neither the convict crop nor the convict garb, nor both together, could disguise the manliness of his aspect. His big grey eyes were at once wrathful and despairing, and his lips were set firm. The expression of his face was that of revolt bound strongly down, and the man was less prepossessing to look at by far than he would have been had he been free and happy.

‘That will do for the present,’ said the Governor, and, touching the gong anew, he gave orders for the temporary disposal of Number 212.

‘Take this man to Horton, with instruc-

tions that he is to be employed about the place.'

The prisoner, wondering what all this might portend, preceded his guard once more, and was marched from the house into an inclosure behind it. This space was still in a ragged and inchoate condition, but it was obvious at the first glance that it was being laid out as a garden. Half-a-dozen men in convict garb were silently at work in it, and a warder was watching over them.

'Here's a new recruit for you,' said the escort. 'The Governor sends his respectful compliments, and will you be so good as to find a berth for him.'

'All right,' returned the warder, and with this brief induction, Number 212 was set to work on the making of the Governor's garden. The toil was easier here, and there was no rattan in evidence. The recruit looked at his new companions from time to time, and thought better of them than of the ferocious and miserable crowd he had so lately quitted.

A clock in the cupola of the house struck the hour of one. The men ceased to work, and moved to a little shed in one corner of the inclosure. The interior of this building was furnished with a rough table of split string-bark. A rude bench stood on either side the table, on which was set a pannikin containing a savoury mess of boiled meat and vegetables. There were tin plates ranged around this central dish, and each plate was flanked by a two-pronged fork and a spoon. The men took their places at the table, and the eldest of them apportioned the contents of the dish. They ate in silence for the most part, though now and then a word was exchanged. After nearly two years of prison fare the change of diet was grateful to Number 212, and he ate with honest appetite, wondering meanwhile what had brought about this change in his position, and whether it might be intended to be permanent.

The meal over, the men went back to work. The warder exercised a general

supervision, but there was no stick, no cursing, no bullying—and a sense of balm and rest began to fall already on Barton's heart. Before nightfall another meal was served, and an hour later the garden-makers were marched to the jail, and there once more surrendered to discipline. Tom spent half the night awake, betwixt hope and fear, and in the morning he was half wild with anxiety to know whether he would be sent back to his former position, or be again installed in the new. In due time his fears were banished, and he found himself once more employed in the garden. This went on, and the peace of it, the heart's repose of it, were beyond all words.

The preliminary year of prison at home had been terrible enough, but from the hour when the convict ship had sailed, bearing him as a portion of its awful freight, his life had been one long-drawn horror. Cooped in with the human offscourings of Great Britain, under a rule which was made by its own

weakness harsh and tyrannous ; dinned with blasphemy and soiled with unspeakable ribaldries ; bereft of wife, and home, and liberty ; forgotten, or so it seemed, by Heaven ; abandoned, with no ill-deserving of his own, to a fate so terrible that a writer of to-day dares not expose the details of its misery, he had hardened himself to a strong despair, and with his own thoughts burning in him night and day like live coals, had striven to open his heart neither to God nor man. The mere absence of tyrannous abuse was a blessing in itself, the unforced and willingly rendered service was a welcome relief from brooding thoughts. He had known that he was growing downwards, brutewards ; but after three days of this new service he began to feel as if he might one day be a man again.

He had been an enthusiastic gardener in the old days at home, and he had a natural taste and talent in that direction. The quality came out here, almost insensibly to

himself, and he found himself set to the work in which he took most interest. He was engaged one day at the side of the house near the white-painted front railings when the Governor, who had been taking a general survey of the garden, came up and stood for a minute or two in silence over him. Two months had now gone by, and the convict, having been intrusted with the laying out and planting of a considerable space, had exercised his own discretion to admirable effect. There were homely English blossoms flowering there already. The beds were edged with neatly-ranged pebbles from the beach, and the walks were firm and trim.

‘ You have been accustomed to this sort of work?’ said the Governor.

‘ Yes, sir,’ said Tom, rising and saluting. His heart had grown tender over the flowers. He had yearned to them as a man might over his children. They took him back to happy days and to Old England. Their very perfume stole into his being. His tears had

fallen on them many and many a time; and, little by little, the heartfelt pleasure of his work had drawn him upwards from the depths of that dead sea of bitterness in which Fate had once bade fair to drown him. The Governor hardly knew the man again, the look his face had worn was so completely absent from it now. He was almost cheery again, and he looked at the Governor with brave and honest eyes, his native candour and kindliness shining in them.

The Governor, exceeding soldierly and resolute in aspect, looked back at him, curling his grey moustache.

‘ You like your employment?’

‘ I do, indeed, sir.’

‘ Good,’ said the Governor, and walked brusquely away.

Tom turned back to his work mightily cheered. The words had been few, but their tone at least was human, and the man in whose hands his destinies lay had looked at him with something in his glance which he

read into approval. Five years is a long space of time, but it does not make up the whole span of a man's life. Hope began to stir again, courage began to rise, and Tom's heart almost brimmed over.

Whilst this new, sweet feeling was at its height a servant from the house approached him. Tom knew that the man was a convict, like himself, but his look and dress afforded no indication of that fact.

‘ You're wanted indoors,’ he said. ‘ Come with me.’

Tom followed obediently, and to his surprise found himself standing in the only apartment of the house he had yet seen, before the Governor's lady. She was alone, and was attired in a riding habit, which was just then a little dusty and disordered.

‘ You are Thomas Barton?’ she asked. He assented respectfully. ‘ You were at one time, as I understand, in the service of Sir Ferdinand de Blacquaire.’

He turned pale at the mention of that

familiar name. The colour forsook his sun-burnt face, and he began to tremble a little.

'Sir Ferdinand and my husband,' pursued the lady, 'are warm friends, and Lady de Blacquaire and I were schoolfellows.'

She was a tall and graceful woman, scarcely more than half the Governor's age, and her manner had in it a very winning cordiality and sweetness.

'The Governor and myself have heard much about you. Sir Ferdinand is positive of your innocence, and recommends you very strongly to our good opinion.'

Tom Barton had not a word to say for himself, but his face grew paler still, and he trembled more and more. The kind face and voice were strange beyond strangeness to him, and the news that at least one friend was staunch came upon him after this long lapse of time with an almost bewildering force.

'You may take it for granted, Barton,' said the lady, 'that so long as your conduct justifies Sir Ferdinand's belief, you will not be

treated with severity. You will be kept in your present position, but you will be allowed to change your dress and will have quarters in the house.'

'Thank you, my lady,' said Tom, in a quivering voice, 'but—'

He could go no further.

'But what?'

'Might I, my lady, might I be allowed to write home, and—tell 'em—Heaven has—' Again he paused, mistrusting his own voice.

'Yes,' she replied, 'I think I may answer for that.'

He managed to speak a broken word or two of thanks.

'Barton,' said the Governor's lady, with some severity, 'you must control yourself.'

'Yes, my lady.'

'You have something to learn which may call for all your fortitude. I expect you to behave like a man.'

'Yes, my lady.'

'A ship has arrived to-day from England.'

‘A ship, my lady?’

‘Be brave, Barton.’ For some reason her own voice shook a little. ‘I expect you to be firm. Lady de Blacquaire has recommended a domestic to me, and she is here.’

‘Here?’ He was like a dead man struggling back to life, uncertain of the sounds and sights about him, but full of a bewildered awe.

‘You are sure you can control yourself, Barton?’

‘Yes, yes, yes; oh, yes.’

‘Wait here.’

She passed swiftly from the room, and the convict stood palpitating and wondering with a heart that beat so it seemed like to burst his breast. He heard the rustle of a dress, and thought she had returned. There was a second’s silence, and then a voice spoke.

‘Tom, Tom, my love, my dear, my husband!’

He turned with a wild cry, and his wife fell fainting in his arms.

CHAPTER VIII

CIRCUMSTANCES alter cases. If Tom Barton had been told a mere two years ago that he could be happy as a convict and in a half-menial employment, he would have thought his informant a fool or a madman. But to be free from daily insult and daily blows, which were more wounding to the spirit than the body, to be free of the horrible and degrading companionship of the frightful herd he had been compelled to live with, to have his true wife back again, to taste hourly the sympathy of her affection, and to enjoy her unshaken faith in him, was like Heaven itself. The days ran by swiftly. No work was too hard, no hour too long. With one or two exceptions, all the people who made up the Governor's household were in the same plight

as himself. The cook was a veritable *cordon bleu*, but had been expatriated for larceny on a largish scale. The head-groom had been a veterinary surgeon who, in a moment of temptation, had signed somebody else's name to a cheque. The household swarmed with thieves, and yet nothing was ever stolen. The penalty was too well known, and lay too near. The burned wrongdoer dreaded the fire, and was too newly escaped from its torments to be ambitious to go back again. The Governor's 'own' man had accompanied his master of his own free will, but he took no airs with his fellow-servants. It was normal to be surrounded by scoundrels, and a man of social turn cannot easily put himself away altogether from intercourse with his fellow-beings. Even Mr. Dogdyke, the Governor's private secretary, a gentleman of unimpeachable character and record, was as civil and condescending as he would have been in an ordinary household.

Mr. Dogdyke was a man of small stature,

dapper, alert, and talkative. He had a remarkably fine growth of naturally curling red hair, which he oiled assiduously with a view of darkening its original colour, and on either cheek he wore a little scrap of fiery red whisker. He was always neat and trim, and though one of the most talkative men under the sun, he never, by any chance, brought anything he might have to say to a finish. The climate of Van Diemen's Land was a theme on which Mr. Dogdyke could always rise to a modified enthusiasm, and if anybody said that it was wholesome, he would answer and say that it was certainly remarkable for its ah—, and would smile and rub his hands by way of filling in his appreciation of its quality. If anybody praised its settled character he would respond that it was much more trustworthy than the climate in the United ah—, and it was felt that his abstention from the utterance of the word 'kingdom' was the natural and delicate expression of a mind which desired not to seem too positive.

He had a sharp nose, which he stuck without ceasing into the affairs of other people, and his sly little brown eyes kept a constant outlook.

Mr. Dogdyke was by nature a private inquiry agent. He never engaged himself professionally in that capacity, but he could not help finding out things. He could not refrain from peeping and peering into the business of any people with whom he came in contact; and though, at this period of his existence, Hobart Town afforded the poorest sort of ground for the exercise of his peculiar talent, he never allowed it to rust for want of use. In spite of his garrulity and his taste for knowledge he was nothing of a gossip in the scandalous sense, but kept the result of all his little inquisitions to himself with a remarkable discretion.

Mr. Dogdyke was married to a young Englishwoman who was vaguely rumoured to have considerable expectations at home, and the pair lived in a four-roomed house of one

story, not far from headquarters. Mrs. Dogdyke, who was a very pretty little person, was universally admired and respected, and was sometimes to be seen at Government House. The range of society was not large, and the good little woman's charm of manner and nature reflected favourably upon her husband, and made his position seem much more considerable than it would have been without her influence.

The Governor's secretary, tripping brightly to and from his daily duties, was always bubbling over with amiable speech, which he was ready to bestow on anybody. Eight or nine hours were daily spent in the performance of his clerical duties, and it was impossible for him to be garrulous with the Governor, of whom he stood in considerable dread. He had always a friendly greeting for Tom Barton, and a sort of acquaintanceship was struck up between them. The Governor's secretary was, of course, a personage, and Barton permitted himself no very great in-

timacy with him, though Mr. Dogdyke was ready to be, so far as conversation went, on terms of *hail-fellow-well-met* with everybody.

Mr. Dogdyke's office overlooked the garden, of which, by this time, Tom had the complete direction and control. Sometimes, on sunny, idle days, the secretary would break from his labours, and, leaning forward with his arms upon the window-sill, would spend a few minutes in conversation, burning, as usual, to find out everything discoverable about his new acquaintance. He got little out of Tom Barton, but he knew from other quarters that Tom was married, and pretty often saw his wife about the house. He had no more reason to wish to be aware of Barton's antecedents than of those of any other man in the world, but, all the same, he wanted to know, and, failing Tom, he tried to pump Tom's wife. She proving little more accessible than her husband, and such scattered little hints of their history as he had gathered

growing more and more provocative of curiosity, he adopted another method.

Mrs. Dogdyke was all simplicity and kindness, and, though married to the Governor's secretary, had no pride. Female society of the respectable, or even of the tolerable, sort was hardly anywhere to be found, and when Mr. Dogdyke became warm in his praises of Mrs. Barton's modesty, good sense, and gentleness of character, the little woman began to take a womanly interest in her. It was not long before Mary and Mrs. Dogdyke were on terms of something very like friendship. Mrs. Barton had always a spare hour or two in the evening, and it came to pass that a good deal of this time was spent with Mrs. Dogdyke, who took an unaffected liking for her, and no more thought of patronising her than a canary would think of patronising a dove. Things went on very agreeably in this fashion until Mr. Dogdyke knew the history of the convict and his wife pretty nearly as well as his own. By this time he was willing

to cool, but his wife and Mrs. Barton continued to see as much of each other as before.

Mr. Dogdyke sat one day at his window, sniffing with satisfaction the flowery odour of the garden, when Tom came by, trundling a wheelbarrow full of tools. He was attired in his ordinary working dress of moleskin trousers and flannel shirt, and, the hideous convict garb abandoned, his hair allowed to assume its natural growth, and a manly beard on lip, cheeks, and chin, he looked as little like a convict as any man might wish.

‘Barton,’ said Mr. Dogdyke, ‘a word with——’

‘By all means, Mr. Dogdyke,’ said Tom, relaxing his hold on the handles of the barrow, and making a straight back for a moment.

‘There’s a ship’s crew ashore to-day, and the men are just a trifle——’

‘Yes,’ said Tom; ‘they are a bit rough.’

‘Your wife, Barton,’ said Mr. Dogdyke,

‘has promised to spend an hour or two with Mrs. Dogdyke this evening, and I think it would be a wise precaution on your part to see her there, and to bring her back later in the——’

‘In the evening, sir,’ said Tom.

‘Precisely,’ said Mr. Dogdyke. ‘I said so You might call for her at nine o’clock.’

‘Thank you, sir, I will.’

‘That is right, Barton,’ said Mr. Dogdyke.
‘That will do.’

Tom went off with his barrow, and would have thought no more about the matter till the time came, but for the wild horseplay of a handful of Jack Tars, who were, even in the early afternoon, well on their way to that bourn of intoxication which was their unfailing haven in those days on shore.

Of all the late reliefs which had come to him there was none more delightful than the knowledge that his wife was not debarred from the society of good and gentle women; and though he himself was, of course, ex-

cluded from the Dogdyke halls, he was none the less pleased and proud in the fact that his wife was admitted. Things were quiet enough when he escorted Mary on her visit, except for an occasional roar from a grog shanty ; and when, punctual to time, he left the Governor's house to escort Mary home again, even that sign of dissipation was absent for the moment. The night was dark, and the stars, bright as they were, illumined it but faintly.

A solitary oil lamp, little more efficacious than a glowworm, burned dimly half-way between Government House and the establishment of Mr. Dogdyke. Just beyond the lamp, as Tom sauntered comfortably along, there rose a scream. He knew the voice for that of his wife, and darted forward. A minute later he saw her struggling in the embraces of a burly fellow. He struck out at the man at once, and landed so viciously on his ribs that he turned half-way round with a gasp and stood for a second helpless.

Recovering himself, he made for his assailant, and came on like a man who knew his business and was bent on doing it. But, in Tom Barton's days in mid-England, the noble art of self-defence was the most popular of exercises, and Tom was no novice at the game. There was no guarding against the other's rush, but he slipped his head aside, snakelike, escaping with a grazed ear, and countered, straight and heavy, with his left. The man staggered, Tom's right went in, and Mrs. Barton's too precipitate admirer lay on his back, and, in answer to Tom's invitation, definitely refused to get up again. He lay there, pouring out imprecations on his conqueror, until Tom seized him by his neck-cloth and dragged him to his feet.

'You foul-mouthed scoundrel,' said Barton, 'how dare you use that language in the hearing of a decent woman? Say that again, or anything like it, and I'll choke the life out of you. Come to the lamp, and let me have a look at you.'

There was a momentary scuffle, but Tom's blood was up, and he felt as strong as two men. The fellow was cowed by the punishment he had already received, and Barton's unrelenting iron grip intimidated him still further. He ended the brief struggle by complete surrender.

'Let him go, Tom,' said Mary. 'Let him go. I'm not a bit hurt, and you've punished him enough already.'

'I shan't hurt him any more,' said Tom, with a savage little laugh. 'I only want to have a look at him.'

He brought his man to the lamp, and turned his face full into its feeble light.

'Oh, it's you, is it?' he said grimly, between his teeth.

It was the bullying labour-master of nine months ago.

'Yes, it's me,' said the fellow, sullenly, 'and it's you, too, seemin'ly.'

'Oh, you remember me, do you?' said Barton.

It was an unlucky speech, but his blood was boiling now anew, and he had double cause for it. The man's face brought before him the memory of daily and hourly outrage. He had schooled himself to endure all this, in his dogged determination that no act of his own should give a colour of justice to his miseries.

The man's face changed from its look of sullen rage to one of keen inquiry. Until that moment Tom's beard had disguised him, but now his glance pierced beyond it and he reconstructed the face he knew.

‘All right, two-one-two. I'll make you smart for this.’

‘You will?’ said Tom. ‘And how?’

‘I'll show you how,’ said the labour-master. ‘I'll have you back under my hands again, my friend, mind that.’

‘Thank you for the warning,’ said Tom.

‘Oh, you've nothing to thank me for yet,’ returned the other.

‘But I have, though,’ Tom answered.

‘You see if I haven’t. We’ll have this out before the Governor. Come along, Mr. Bostock.’

‘Tom,’ cried Mary, ‘let him go. Don’t take a thing like that before the Governor. What will my lady think of me? Don’t do it, Tom.’

‘Do you think, my dear,’ said Tom, keeping a glittering eye on his captive, and holding the same unyielding grip on shirt, neck-cloth, and coat; ‘do you think I’m going to let this poisonous snake set his mates on to take away my character, or plague me into madness? No, no, my dear. I’m goin’ to scotch him, and I’m goin’ to do it now. As for what the Governor’s lady will think about you, you needn’t worry, I’m sure. She knows you well enough by this time.’

With that there was a little further scuffle, for Bostock was naturally reluctant to face authority under the circumstances; but Barton was the stronger, and he had to yield.

‘Go in, Mary,’ said Tom, as they reached the door of the house, ‘and let your mistress know what’s happened. Tell her I’ve got this fellow here.’

Mary obeyed, and her mistress, hearing the news, ran at once to the supreme authority, and told the story hot with anger. Down strode the Governor, twirling his moustache with both hands, and sternly ordered the offender to enter. He shrank in with a deadly glance at Barton, who followed close at his heels.

Tom told his story briefly.

‘You struck me first,’ said Bostock.

‘Of course I did,’ said Tom.

‘What have you to say?’ asked the Governor, when the charge was made. The man had nothing to say, but he smeared the blood from his face with a red cotton handkerchief, and again looked meaningfully at his captor.

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ said Barton. ‘I wouldn’t have brought this man here at

all, but he told me he'd have me back under his charge. You'll excuse my boldness, sir, but the officers all hang together. They can't help it, sir. They're obliged to do it. If one of them has a grudge against a poor fellow, all the rest are down on him.'

'Whether you go back or not,' said the Governor, 'depends entirely on your own conduct. You may go, Barton.'

Tom withdrew.

'And so,' said the Governor, with his elbows on the table before him, 'you're going to have Number 212 back again, are you?' The man made no answer. 'I am compelled,' pursued the Governor, 'to support my officers of every grade in the performance of their duty, and I'll do it; but you will understand, if you please, that nobody's fate is in your keeping. I will have it known that my wife's domestics are safe from insult or molestation, and I have a mind to order you a round six dozen for this night's work. Mind you, sir, I see much of which I think it worth while

to take no official notice. Take any steps to annoy the man who has so deservedly chastised you to-night, and I dismiss you from your post. You understand ?'

The man saluted clumsily and murmured an inarticulate something.

' You understand ?' cried the colonel, bringing his palm down heavily on the desk before him.

' Yes, sir,' rapped out Bostock. ' Quite, sir.'

' That will do. Right about face. March.'

Bostock went to his own quarters, breathing threats and slaughter. His aspect created some amusement among his mates, but they found him little disposed to join in their gaieties when he had so far swallowed his rage and mortification that he could tell the tale. He told it, and, of course, as a person of professed gallantry, slandered the woman who had repelled him.

' She had no objections,' said the scoundrel. ' She wouldn't ha' squealed if she hadn't seen her husband coming.'

'Such a conquering dog you are,' said one of his pals. 'I shouldn't wonder if she's dying for you. With a head like that on you too!'

To tell the truth, none of Mr. Bostock's compeers had any especial sympathy for him in his misfortune, but on the point of *esprit de corps* they were all agreed. If any convict, whether petted by the Governor or otherwise, began to assert his independence in this fashion it was time to set him down, and it was fully understood that some attempt should be made in that direction. The men were not inhuman by nature, but there is no custom in the world which grows like that of cruelty; and in those vile days, dead and buried now, thank God, for ever, a convict, to the average official heart, was beyond the pale of pity.

CHAPTER IX

THINGS went smoothly with the Bartons, and for the most part uneventfully, for the space of two years. The petty officials did their utmost, but with every week that passed the absolute integrity of man and wife stood more clearly revealed, and they were fixed more firmly in the esteem, and even the affections, of their protectors. So small spite raged furiously without effect, and the enmity of Mr. Bostock imagined a vain thing. Within a week of the second anniversary of Mary's arrival at Hobart she presented her husband with a son. The new arrival was lusty and vigorous from the first, and was a source of tender envy to Mary's mistress, who, though blessed with the maternal instinct in full measure, was childless.

The boy was christened Michael, in memory of Mary's father, and Hawthorne, in memory of Tom's mother—Michael Hawthorne Barton. Whilst he lay crowing in his cradle there came a letter from England to his mother, announcing that an aunt of Mary's had died, leaving instructions to the effect that the small property on which she had lived since her husband's death should be immediately realised, and the proceeds remitted to her niece. The old lady had resided at Beacon Hargate, and the only person connected with the law of whom she had any personal knowledge was that Mr. Denton who had defended her niece's husband on his trial. Without consulting him she had made him her sole executor, and this fact had restored Tom and his fate to the barrister's memory.

The deceased aunt had no other relative than her niece, and had indicated her last wishes in a quaintly worded letter to Parson Heathcote. Denton had accepted the charge

thus thrust upon him, had fulfilled his duties, handing the money realised by the sale of the estate to a firm of shipping agents, and inclosing to Mrs. Barton a draft for the amount, payable by the firm at Hobart. The value of the draft approached very nearly the sum of fifteen hundred pounds, and Denton's letter inclosing it ran thus. (I omit the business detail explained already.)

‘ You will find the draft inclosed. If you should make up your minds to return to England when your husband is set at liberty, you will find that old friends have not forgotten you. Lady de Blacquaire, whom I have met within the last few years pretty frequently, is still as warmly attached to you as ever, and as anxious to befriend you. Sir Ferdinand has been unremitting in his endeavours to secure a remission of your husband's sentence, and still believes most profoundly in his innocence, as I have always done.

‘ Unfortunately, a Government is now in

power from which Sir Ferdinand naturally expects nothing. Should his own party secure office at the next election he will have influence, and you may be certain that he will use it to the full. For my own part I have only to add that if at any time I can in any way be of service to you, you need be in no fear of taxing me. I believe your husband to be an extremely ill-used man, and I should not easily express my sense of your own courage and devotion. I beg you not to accept anything I have said as being merely complimentary. If you should ever have need of any help of mine in any direction, you may ask for it with the certainty that it will be heartily rendered. I hear great things of the soil and climate of Van Diemen's Land, and of the prices at which land may be purchased there. Barton is a practical farmer, and will know how far these statements are to be relied on. You may possibly make up your minds to remain where you are; but in any case

you may rely upon the friendship and good wishes of all who knew you both in England.'

Mary ran straight to the garden with this letter and its inclosure, and placed them both in her husband's hands. He read the letter with a swelling heart, and handed it back to her in silence.

'Nothing to say, dear?' she asked.

'Too much to say to be able to say it,' Tom answered.

'Shall I show it to my lady?' asked Mary.

'Yes, dear,' he answered. 'The Governor might keep the money for you. There's light ahead! Only three more years in front of us, and we're not unhappy.'

'Unhappy,' she echoed. 'If you were only free, Tom, there'd be no happier people in the world.'

'That's a good man,' said Tom, pointing to the letter.

'My dear,' she answered, 'there are plenty

of good people in the world, and the best of them all belongs to me.'

'No,' said Tom, 'to me.'

They were in sight of a whole row of windows, and no endearments were possible. He laid a hand upon her shoulder as he spoke, and then turned back to his work again. Mary stood smiling for a minute, and then went back to the house and sought her mistress.

'Will you be kind enough to read this, ma'am?' she asked. Mrs. Gourlay accepted the letter, and read it through

'Leave this with me,' she said. 'I should like to show it to Colonel Gourlay.'

The Governor was at home to luncheon, and his wife laid the letter quietly before him.

'That decides the question,' he said, when he had read it to the end.

'What question, dear?'

'Well, you see,' said the Governor, 'I've been thinking for a month or two past of

giving that poor fellow his papers, and telling him to make a start for himself. Here's land to be had for a song, and with the natural advantages of the country it's out of reason to suppose that it can be kept as a mere convict settlement for ever. There'll be a great people here one of these days, and we shall get no better class of settlers than Barton and his wife.'

'And this,' said Mrs. Gourlay, touching the paper, 'settles the question?'

'Yes,' said the Governor, 'it settles it. You'll be sorry to part with your maid, but I'm thinking alike of the good of the people and the good of the colony.'

'And so am I,' the lady answered. 'For her own sake I shall be glad to let her go.'

The Governor was a man of action, and in a week from the receipt of Denton's letter Tom Barton was virtually a free man. There was no going back to England, and perhaps he turned all the more lovingly to the old country on that account. But there was

plenty of work for willing hands to do. He tramped out thirty miles to examine the land under Mount Madagascar. An English family had already settled there—an elderly farmer, with a wife, two sons, and a daughter. Tom heard excellent accounts of the settler, and the man proved himself by a hearty welcome. The land looked likely to be prosperous, there was abundance of water, and in less than a week the liberated convict was at work.

He bought building materials, chartered a waggon, and with his own unaided hands built for himself a three-roomed house of one story, went back to Hobart, purchased there such implements as were at once obtainable and necessary, and solemnly installed himself in his new home with wife and child. All day long and for many a day the sound of his axe awoke the echoes of the forest, and in due time he cleared space for a garden and planted it. It was hard work, but there was hope in it, and as he sat and smoked his pipe

by his own fireside, he and Mary held long talks together. They decided never to go back to England, but to carve out for themselves such fortune as they could in the new country to which the strange vicissitudes of fate had brought them. Labour was scarce and dear, but Barton was now a capitalist, if only a small one, and in the course of time he hired help, and began to get considerable tracts of land in order.

His sentence had almost expired, and he could already see a life-long competence before him. At first, to his own surprise, he felt himself treated with as much consideration as if the convict taint had never rested on him, but by-and-bye he got used to this condition of affairs, and felt himself a man again. It was his duty at stated intervals to report himself, and it was only on these occasions that his position seemed irksome. The officials whom he encountered made the most of their position and the worst of his, but he always controlled his

temper resolutely, and gave them no handle for mischief.

It is a long lane that has no turning, and at last came the blessed day when he had to report himself for the last time. He rode into Hobart for that purpose, make his formal presentation of himself, endured the customary insolence and disdain, and mounted to ride back again. At the extreme limit of the little township he encountered Dogdyke and Mrs. Dogdyke in a diminutive buggy drawn by the small, rugged pony. Mrs. Dogdyke laid her hands upon the reins, and brought the pony to a halt.

‘I am glad to see you, Mr. Barton,’ said the good little woman. ‘I have had a letter written for a week, but nobody has been going your way, and I have not known how to send it. Mr. Dogdyke and I are taking the next ship home to England. Mr. Dogdyke’s father is dead, and has left his business to Mr. Dogdyke.’

‘We are all mortal,’ said Mr. Dogdyke, ‘and my father, though profoundly respected,

has been ailing for many years. He has at last succumbed to the attacks of an insidious——'

'I should dearly like to say good-bye to Mrs. Barton,' said the little woman, 'but I don't know how I am to get so far. Do you think she could contrive to get to Hobart?'

'She'd do that, glad and willing,' Tom responded, 'but the child's a bit ailing, somehow. We don't know much about children, neither of us, but the missus thinks he's sickening for something. She'd take it very hard if she missed seeing you, Mrs. Dogdyke. If you'll promise to come over, I'll find the means to get ye there and bring ye back again. We're a bit rough up to now, but you'll find a hearty welcome, and we shall both take it as a kindness if you'll come.'

'I'll come with pleasure,' said Mrs. Dogdyke, 'but I am afraid, Mr. Barton, that I shall have to inflict myself upon you for the night, and I don't know if you have room enough.'

'Room in plenty, ma'am,' Tom declared, with heartiness. 'Room for Mr. Dogdyke too, if he'll come and try pot-luck with us.'

'I am afraid,' said Mr. Dogdyke, 'that the multiplicity of my engagements will prevent me from accepting your flattering——'

'As you please, sir,' cried Tom. 'We shall be honoured if you can find the time. I know where I can get a buggy. I'll ride back and see about it now, and if Mrs. Dogdyke will be so good as to tell me when, I'll come in and fetch her. I can leave my horse here when I come, and ride him back again when I've brought Mrs. Dogdyke home.'

The matter was so arranged, and the journey was fixed for the morrow. When Tom returned in the morning he found, somewhat to his surprise, that Mr. Dogdyke had abandoned his reserve, and was prepared to accompany him. They bowled along quite merrily for some two-thirds of the distance, and were suddenly brought to a standstill by a hoarse voice behind them, which bellowed :

‘Halt!’ Tom stood up in the buggy, and turned. They were in the open at this time, and about two hundred yards was labour-master Bostock on horseback, pounding along full speed. He had a brace of warders behind him, and all three were armed.

‘Why don’t you halt when you’re ordered?’ growled Bostock, checking his horse viciously.

Tom sat down in silence, his surest way of irritating the other, and his sagest. The two warders came up, and drew rein beside the buggy.

‘D’ye hear?’ said Bostock.

‘I hear,’ Tom answered. ‘What’s the matter?’

‘I’ll show you what the matter is,’ said Bostock. ‘Drive on, and give me none of your lip.’

‘This,’ said Mr. Dogdyke, ‘is really very peculiar behaviour. May I ask the reason of this extraordinary——’

‘A man got away last night,’ said Bostock,

‘ and this fellow,’ with a contemptuous jerk of his thumb towards Tom, ‘ is suspected of harbouring him.’

‘ Who suspects?’ asked Tom.

‘ I don’t want any of your cheek,’ returned Bostock. ‘ You drive on, and take it easy. Don’t you sweat my horses any more.’

‘ You’ll forgive me for naming this in your presence, Mr. Dogdyke,’ said Tom, twinkling with suppressed humour, ‘ but this is the fellow I had to give a hidin’ to that night my wife was insulted coming from your house. You see he’s got some sort of a remembrance of it. It’s like enough one of these days I may freshen his mind a bit. Call on me this day three months, will you, Bostock, and then I’ll talk t’ye.’

‘ Now, then,’ said Bostock, ‘ are you going to keep us here all day?’

Barton was fulfilling his injunction somewhat too literally for his fancy.

‘ Set your own pace,’ said Tom, ‘ I’ll keep it.’

'This,' declared Bostock, addressing Dogdyke, 'is the most troublesome convict beast in the whole settlement.'

'Mr. Dogdyke,' said Tom, 'I call you to witness that this man is attempting to provoke me to a breach of the peace. I shall keep my temper till I can keep it no longer.'

'Best keep a still tongue, my man,' said one of Bostock's companions, and Tom, turning angrily in his direction, caught sight of Mrs. Dogdyke's frightened face, and resumed possession of himself.

'I beg your pardon, ma'am,' he said.
'They shan't get another word out of me.'

He adhered to that resolve, though the two exhausted a not very abundant faculty of satire in the attempt to draw him out again. The presence of the Dogdykes restrained them a good deal, and they were far from having a free hand. Mr. Bostock in especial found his powers of eloquence curtailed in the presence of a lady. He had

to suppress a full half of his vocabulary, and under these conditions felt almost tongue-tied.

The episode caused but little delay, for the leader of the party set off at a good-round pace again, and Tom kept up with him.

With the little spite characteristic of him, the fellow rode fastest where the way was roughest; but Tom was a fairly accomplished whip, and though Dogdyke trembled and held tight, his wife sat out the journey with a smile.

‘Get out,’ said Bostock, when the home-stead was reached. ‘Stay there.’

‘I shall report your conduct, Bostock,’ said Dogdyke, who was white with the fears of the last hour, and prodigiously relieved to find himself safe on earth once more. ‘I shall report your conduct in the proper quarter.’

‘As you please,’ Bostock answered. ‘I know my duty and I shall do it. One of you

stay outside and look after that fellow. You, Jennings, come with me.'

Mrs. Barton stood wonderingly at the door, but Tom reassured her in a sentence.

'There's nothing the matter, my dear. This fellow pretends to think as I'm a harbouring a runaway convict. He's goin' to search the house. I'm sure he's sweetly welcome.'

'I should advise you to watch your valuables, madam,' said Mr. Dogdyke, who was now thoroughly on the side of the oppressed.

'Yes,' said Tom, with a touch of the old local drawl, 'theer's reason in all things.'

Bostock and the warder pushed roughly by Mary, and passed into the middle room of the house.

'You'll find nothing here, gentlemen,' she said. 'Pray do your duty as quiet as you can. My child's asleep, and he's very ailing just as present.'

The two ruffians began at once to make an alarming clatter, banging about chairs and table in a transparent pretence of searching

for some person who obviously could not be concealed within the room. This done, they burst noisily into one of the side rooms, and finding exactly what they suspected there, made for the other. The mother confronted them at the door.

‘Gentlemen, please; please don’t make a noise. The child’s really very ill.’

‘Stand on one side,’ roared Bostock, and banging the door open he strode into the room. The sleeping child woke with a cry, and the mother, running to him, gathered him hastily to her breast, wrapped in the shawl which had covered him. She bore him into the open air, and tried to soothe him, but the child only cried the louder. Bostock, his pretended search completed, followed her with a grin on his ungainly features. The indignant mother turned on him.

‘You brute! ’

His face darkened, and he stared at her for a moment. Luckily for all concerned, he said nothing, but after regarding her in jeer-

ing silence for half-a-minute, turned and mounted his horse. The child shrieked with fright and inward pain, and Mr. Bostock made a grimace as of one who swalloweth verjuice unawares, and waved a protesting hand against it.

‘For God’s sake, some of you,’ he cried, ‘put a stopper on that convict’s brat.’

CHAPTER X

AT the very instant at which these brutal words were spoken the child ceased to wail. There was silence for the space of a second only, and yet it seemed long to everybody. The mother turned with a glance so passionately, so fierily indignant upon Bostock that he, rough as he was by nature and brutalised by habit, half quailed before her. Barton made a single step forward, and laid a hand upon a hoe which stood near the door of the hut. There would certainly have been mischief, and mischief of a serious sort, if one of the mounted warders had not put spur into his horse and brought himself between the angry men, the husband and the insulter. Barton stood glaring for a minute, but threw down the rough and ready weapon he had

seized, and, turning his back upon the group, entered the hut without a word. Mary followed him in silence, and Dogdyke, puffing and blowing with an angry sense of wounded self-importance, stood searching in vain for words.

From Dogdyke's point of view the outrage was directed against himself. He was not merely a personage in his own estimation, but he was but newly released from the honourable office of secretary to the Governor, and he was now going home to inherit a large and prosperous business. He was an associate, for the moment at least, of the man who had been thus stigmatised ; his wife had given her friendship and countenance to the wife of the insulted man ; and the worst of it all was that the calumny was actually justified and unanswerable.

‘ You are a low fellow,’ said Mr. Dogdyke, finding tongue at last. ‘ You are a low blackguard fellow, and I'll make it my duty to report your conduct to the Governor imme-

diately on my return to Hobart. There are things,' pursued Mr. Dogdyke, waving his hand and assuming an almost oratorical bearing, 'which are intolerable to a man of feeling; there are statements which cannot be denied which would only be publicly made by a person lost to delicacy and all the finer feelings of our common human——'

Mr. Dogdyke's customary failing here beset him, and, in the midst of his impassioned declaration, his voice slid off into an indeterminate murmur, and the fire of anger ceased to flame.

'Leave them to themselves,' said Mrs. Dogdyke. 'Take no notice of them, John; they are unworthy of it.'

Bostock jeered as they entered the hut, and he and his fellows rode away together by the track leading to the bush. Their whole object in taking the route they had chosen had been to lay an insult upon the man who would so soon be beyond their reach, and that object being accomplished, they were perforce

content to ride off for the continuance of their pretended search. Once out of sight they made a *détour*, and struck off in a direction in which they were much more likely to find the man whom they pursued.

Tom Barton, on entering the little house, sat down upon a chest opposite to the door, and did his best to subdue himself. His hands writhed, and his face was grey with rage. He had long since learned the necessary lesson of self-control, but no such lesson is mastered for ever by any man, and now that for a moment the old bitter and passionate sense of injustice was awakened, it took all his strength to control it.

Mary, following him, took her place in a rocking chair with the child in her arms. The little fellow had once more begun fretfully to complain, and the mother, half mechanically recognising his trouble, drew him closer to her bosom, and rocked him to and fro. She looked straight before her with a face as colourless as her husband's, seeing nothing,

hearing nothing, and seeming for the time being to herself as if she felt nothing.

Dogdyke's speech outside fell upon the ears of husband and wife, and each of them, in a fashion, followed the meaning of the words. They heard the noise made by the retiring horsemen, and then Dogdyke entered, still fuming. Lucy followed, and, seeing the look on Mrs. Barton's face, approached the chair she sat in and knelt down beside her.

'Don't grieve, my dear,' she said kindly. 'It was a wicked thing to say, but it can't make any difference to those who know you and love you. Don't care about it, my dear. Don't think about it. Don't remember it.'

As Mrs. Dogdyke laid her hand upon her arm, Mary suddenly ceased her agitated plunging to and fro in the rocking chair and sat quite silent. At this the child began to cry more loudly, and Mrs. Dogdyke made a motion to take it to her own arms. Mary broke into loud and passionate weeping, and, rising swiftly to her feet, began to pace up

and down the room, hugging the little fellow still more closely, and kissing him with an almost passionate hysteria.

In all their times of trial—and they had been many and severe—her husband had never known her to give way. He had never so much as seen a tear in her eyes. Sometimes she had looked worn, and sometimes, as was no more than natural, a little sad ; but she had borne everything with a tranquil nobility of spirit which had seemed to him altogether admirable and beautiful. Her unshakable faith in him, her devotion to him, her courage and cheerful steadfastness had made his wife not much less than an angel in his eyes ; and that any scoundrel should have had power to wound her thus filled him with a rage of mingled wrath and tenderness. He forgot the presence of Dogdyke and his wife, and took Mary and the child together into his own strong arms.

‘Don’t cry, dear,’ he said, ‘don’t cry.’

His voice trembled and was very husky.

‘Tom,’ cried his wife, drawing away from him, ‘I’ve stood everything up to now. I’ve never minded anything for your sake, Tom, but I won’t have this. I won’t! I won’t! I won’t!’ she declared in a voice of agony. ‘They shan’t say anything against my child.’

‘They shan’t, my darling,’ said Tom, soothingly. ‘Don’t take on about it. It’s only a low scoundrel like that fellow Bostock as could ha’ said it. Let him be, my darling, let him be.’

‘Tom!’ said his wife, almost wildly, as she held out the child before her, ‘I love him dear. Heaven knows I love him, but I’d rather see him in his little coffin—I’d rather bury him—I’d rather let him wander away in the wide, wide world, and never see his face again—than have him live to grow up and to understand those wicked, wicked words.’

The husband was powerless at the sight of this passion of grief and anguish, but he was thoroughly single-hearted, and his wife’s

trouble banished his remembrance of the insult. He attempted once more to soothe her, but it was all in vain: Mary was not to be comforted. She had schooled herself nearly seven years ago to the knowledge that she, as a convict's wife, must look for occasional insult and undeserved disdain. Her surety in her husband's innocence had been her support through all that, and it had been, too, a part of the burden she had wilfully elected to carry, that the husband she loved so dearly should be subject to contempt and scorn. But until that hour it had never occurred to her to think that her child would bear the same brand, she had never dreamed that any creature should be base enough and cruel enough to transfer the undeserved stigma from the father and fasten it upon the child. It is always the form of crime which is least possible to ourselves which excites our greatest wonder and our deepest loathing. That is a very commonplace reflection, little more original than the statement that two and two

make four, but even a commonplace is worth asserting sometimes.

It was precisely such an insult as Bostock had hurled at her which would have been the last of possible crimes for Mary Barton. It seemed incredible that any creature in the world should have been guilty of so mean a wickedness. Her child, her pure and innocent baby, to be branded so ! She felt for the time being as if her heart were broken.

It was an hour or two before she could be pacified, and even then there came no more than that seeming of tranquillity which at such times is brought about by fatigue. Mrs. Dogdyke helped her to her room, and the heart-wounded creature lay down with her boy still in her arms and sobbed herself to sleep. Tom and Dogdyke walked together over the roughly-cleared farming land and made an examination of the crops, which was, as might have been expected under the circumstances, rather cursory.

‘ When I get back to Hobart, said

Dogdyke, ' I'll make that blackguard smart. I'll tell you what it is, Barton. I consider that his conduct is a reflection upon myself. I don't choose that people with whom I consort should be subjected to that kind of insult.'

The fact that Mr. Dogdyke was aggrieved was no great comfort to Barton, and when the little man would fain have gone on with the display of his own wounded self-importance, under the devout impression that he was espousing Mrs. Barton's cause, Tom stopped him somewhat bluntly.

'I don't want to hear anything more about this, Mr. Dogdyke,' he said, sticking his hands into the side-pockets of his jean coat and turning round upon his guest with a lowering look altogether unfamiliar to his face. 'Let this be the last of it, if you'll be so good, sir.'

Now, when you are pouring out oil of vitriol on the wounds of a friend under the profound belief that you are anointing him with balm of Gilead, it is always an irritating

thing to be arrested in your Christian efforts to be of service. Tom's refusal of his sympathy made Dogdyke angry, and the two finished their round about the farm with but little further conversation.

They were out for an hour or two, and when they returned near sundown, Mary, neat, orderly, and quiet as ever in demeanour, was going about the rooms and making preparations for the evening meal. Her face was pale save where the salt of tears had reddened it, and once or twice Tom, regarding her watchfully, heard a quick little involuntary sigh from her—such a swift jerking breath as one notices from a child who has had its cry out and has forgotten all about it, though in some occult way his nerves still remember. She gave no further sign than this, and the party tranquilly took tea together, Dogdyke leading such conversation as there was to his own affairs, and diverging thence into the history of the Dogdyke family, which had once on a time included in its

ranks no less a dignitary than a Lord Mayor of London.

The business Dogdyke had just succeeded to, and was now going out to control, lay in the City, and Dogdyke evidently had it in his mind that it was not absolutely impossible that he too might share the civic glory of his far-off ancestor. He was not particularly brilliant, nor remarkably interesting to those who listened to him, but at least he kept them from thinking of the events of the afternoon, and in so far was a distinct blessing.

Mrs. Dogdyke and Mary spent the evening in the sleeping-room, and Dogdyke and Tom smoked outside the door of the hut until complete darkness wrapped the country in its folds. The house had but limited accommodation for four people, and the only possible arrangement for their disposition was that the two women should occupy the bedroom, whilst the men made each for himself a shake-down on the floor of the adjoining apartment. It was after midnight when Tom,

lying hardly asleep, heard a faint creaking at the bedroom door, and saw, by the faint moonlight which glimmered through the unshuttered window, the figure of his wife standing in the doorway.

‘Anything the matter, dear?’ he asked her in a whisper.

‘Nothing,’ she answered.

Tom raised himself on his elbow and looked at her, but offered no further inquiry. She stood for a moment as if undetermined whether to advance or retire, but suddenly, with a quick, light footstep, made for the door which led to the open air. It was merely latched, and yielded to her hand at once. Before Tom could make out her purpose she had walked into the midnight darkness.

He rose hastily and followed her, barefooted. He had thrown himself upon the blankets half-dressed. Mary was standing at a distance of only a yard or two from the house, and he could make out nothing but that she was looking straight before her, and

that she stood with both hands clasped upon her breast. He laid his hands upon her shoulders and peered into her face, anxiously striving to read the expression there. The moon was at this season a mere crescent thread, and in a less clear atmosphere would have yielded no perceptible light at all. Shining even through this pure air it gave the disturbed husband only the faintest aid.

‘What is it, darlin’?’ he asked her gently in a half whisper. Then, without waiting for her reply, ‘Don’t let it trouble you now, my dear. Don’t let it trouble you.’

She stood like a statue. He could just see that her eyes kept the same fixed look. She seemed not to hear, and he tightened his grasp upon her shoulders.

‘Speak to me, my dear. What’s the matter?’

Tom knew well enough what the matter was, and the question was no more than one of those helpless efforts to soothe which affection uses in the face of a grief which is not yet

to be consoled. Still Mary gave no answer, and he shook her slightly to call her attention to himself.

‘Try to speak, my darlin’. Don’t take on like this—don’t let it hurt you i’ this way. Cry a bit if you think it’d do you good, now.’

He put his arms about her and drew her gently to his shoulder, and as he did so he felt a faint shudder run through her frame from head to foot.

‘It isn’t worth while to take on like this,’ he whispered helplessly.

‘Tom, dear,’ she answered, drawing herself away from him and seizing both his hands in hers as she did so, ‘it shan’t happen again.’

‘No, no, my darlin’,’ Tom said soothingly, ‘it never shall happen any more.’

‘It’ll happen every day if he stays here,’ she answered. Her voice rose little above a whisper, but she spoke with an intense vehemence he had never observed in her before. ‘So long as he stays here people will say it. If they dare not say it before your

face they'll say it behind your back. If they don't say it they'll think it, and I won't have it even thought.'

'My dear,' said Tom, 'I shall have my freedom in a month. So soon as ever that happens, I shall sell the farm and we'll get away to America. That's the only plan that I can see.'

'It's not the only plan that I can see,' she answered. 'I've been lying awake thinking of it ever since I got to bed, and I've made my mind up. I came out here because I couldn't bear to think about it lying still, but I've made my mind up, Tom, and there's nothing in the world will alter me.'

'My dear,' said Tom, 'you didn't use to be like this. You may be quite sure I shan't try to go again you. You can have your way, whatever it is. Tell me what you have made your mind up to.' She stood for a minute or two in silence, and he waited for her answer patiently.

'Tell me,' he said again at last.

'I am going to ask Mrs. Dogdyke,' his wife responded, 'to take the child away with her. They're leaving in four days, Tom.'

He made a motion as if he would have interrupted her, but she stretched up her hands as if to command him to be silent, and he obeyed the gesture.

'I'm not going,' she said, 'to do you any harm by my fancies, Tom. You've got to sell the farm, and that'll take some time—it may even take a month or two, three or four months, maybe half-a-year, before you can get the worth of the land and all your labour on it. I'm not going to let you lose for me, and I'm not that selfish that I'm goin' to run away from you. I've thought it out, Tom, and I've thought it out quite clear. Mrs. Dogdyke shall take the child away with her. I can do without him, for his sake, for a little while, dear as I love him. I told you this afternoon I'd rather see him dead than have him talked about in such a way. I can pay Mrs. Dogdyke for her trouble, and she likes

me well enough to help me. She's got no children of her own, and she's fond of little Michael. I know she'll do it, willing, and you mustn't try to change my mind, Tom. It'll only make unhappiness between us.'

'Why, as to that, my dear,' Tom answered, 'I fancy that'll be a hard thing to do. I shall never try to change your mind about anythin' that belongs to your own child. Take a little time to think about this. Don't let the idea run away with you. You've got three or four days to turn it over in. If your mind don't change you shall have your way.'

She threw both arms about his neck and kissed him.

'But what I misdoubt about it is,' said Tom, 'that you'll never bring yourself to part with the child. Don't do anythin' rash, dear—don't do anythin' rash. Wait and see. You're gettin' no good in the night air here. Won't you go indoors again?'

'I'm happier now,' she answered, clinging

to him, 'and I shall sleep with a clear conscience. Tom, you're the best husband i' the world. You never let me wish for anything that you can give me.'

'I've got the best wife i' the world,' said Tom. 'That much I know. Take your own way to be happy, my dear, and so long as you *are* happy I shall be satisfied. But don't send the child away to be pinin' about him afterwards.'

'I shan't pine about him,' she answered firmly, 'so long as I know I've sent him away for his own good.'

Tom sighed a little, and released her.

'You'd best get back to bed again, my dear.'

'Ah,' she said, 'but I won't have you grievin' about it.'

'Look here,' said Tom, with a sort of dogged patience, 'I've never disputed your way with the child. The child belongs to you, and whatever you choose to do for him is done for his good, I know. All I ask you

is not to grieve yourself. You've had trouble enough, Heaven knows, a'ready.'

'No fear for me,' she answered, almost brightly. 'No fear at all for me. Good-night, darlin', and thank you, thank you from the very bottom of my heart.'

She gave him a last kiss and fluttered into the house. Tom stood alone a little while, feeling rather staggered and disconsolate at the turn affairs had taken. He feared that Mary's resolution, if put into effect, would be regretted in a very little while, and yet he saw that without the remonstrance which he did not care to offer, or feel himself justified in offering, he was powerless to prevent her from acting as she had decided. Whilst he stood thinking Mary came back again, and when she spoke to him her voice was gay and playful.

'You silly old Tom,' she said, 'standing there with bare feet on the bare ground. You'll catch your death of cold. Come inside.

He made no immediate response, so she pulled him towards the door, laid him down on his improvised couch with imperious playfulness, covered him with the rugs he had thrown off on arising, and tucked up his feet with a number of little pats which were evidently intended to be punitive. Then for one second she bent over him with a happy little gurgle of laughter, pecked with a kiss at his nose, pulled his beard, and ran back to her own room.

‘She seems to be happy about it,’ Tom thought, ‘and if she isn’t goin’ to fret she couldn’t have come to a better resolution.’

With that reflection he tried to compose himself to sleep, but lay awake for an hour or two, in spite of his best efforts, looking at the future. He was all but a free man again, and in a very little while would be able to go where he might choose, and to map out his own destiny. As he was falling half asleep after many reflections, it occurred to him, in a dim sort of way, that it would not be an

unwise thing if, on reaching America, he should decide to change his name. He had christened the boy Michael Hawthorne—why should not the disgraced Barton's surname be forgotten, wiped out, eliminated altogether? In a new but already populous country like America he might lose all trace of his former self, retaining only his own integrity. Thus no man could raise his voice against the boy.

That was something to think about, and he lay considering it in a half slumber, too lazy and inactive in his mind to make an actual proposition of it or to survey it seriously, and with a generally loose idea that it might be worth while to investigate it at some more active moment. With that thought still in his mind he fell asleep, and, as often happens, his waking in the morning brought his last conscious fancy back again. It came back clear, sharply defined, almost like a resolution. He put it by for the present, for there was something in it from which his whole mind turned, but he resolved at least to think it over.

CHAPTER XI

To plan the smallest deceit is, to a man so rigidly honest as Tom Barton was, a matter at once difficult and repulsive. It was all very well for Tom to tell himself that the motive justified everything, but he could see ahead of himself a number of little falsehoods from which his whole nature shrank.

He and Mary together laid out and matured a plan. Michael Hawthorne Barton was to go to England as Michael Hawthorne; Tom Barton and Mary Barton, his parents, were, in as short a space of time as should prove possible for them, to follow him, taking ship under their own name as far as Plymouth and then becoming Tom and Mary Hawthorne. They resolved to take up their child from the care of the Dogdykes and go straight to

America under the new name, where there would be no fear of recognition, and no fear of the child's future being spoiled by the mischance that had befallen the father. It was Tom who originally suggested this plan, but it was his wife who really arranged the details of it, and Tom consoled himself for the disposition of affairs by the natural reflection that matters of small deceit were less immoral in the female sex than in his own.

The Dogdykes were quite willing to take little Michael. Mrs. Dogdyke quite leapt at the chance of relieving the tedium of a long voyage by his companionship, and Mr. Dogdyke, who was not nearly so much a ruler of the household as he thought and pretended, gave way with a very tolerable grace. Tom placed in Dogdyke's hand a sum of two hundred pounds. The provision looked extravagant, but Mary would have it, so that, in case the child fell ill, his temporary guardian should be able to consult the very best

medical men to be engaged for money. In her enforced absence from him it was essential that the child should want for nothing. Even if the money had been Tom's own he would have been willing to make this provision, but, as it was, it belonged entirely to his wife, and she was fully welcome to her own way in everything.

The parting, when it came, was hard both for the father and the mother, and when the ship sailed away from Hobart Town bearing their treasure with it, they returned home in a very sorrowful and disconsolate mood. Mary shed a tear or two, and Tom began to fear that she already regretted the resolve she had so determinately carried into effect. But in a day or two he learned better. He could see that she was happier and brighter than he had ever known her to be. They made a quiet fête together when the day of Tom's freedom at length arrived, and began instantly to arrange for their own departure to England. But here an unexpected circumstance stepped

in, and their plans took an unexpected direction.

A customer had already been found for the farm, and the improvements Barton had effected on the land were to be taken fairly liberal account of. The bargain was not actually closed, but would have been concluded within a week if it had not been for the intervention of one Horrocks, an angular Yankee farm hand, who, by some strange chance, had wandered out to that part of the world, and had now been in Barton's employment for a year.

He was a loose-limbed, grey-bearded man, was Horrocks, with a hawk-like nose and a pair of very small and glittering eyes. Nose and eyes alone were visible amid the ragged and unkempt growth of hair and beard. He went shambling about the place with the appearance of being of very little value to anybody; but, in spite of his lazy and slouching aspect, got through his work respectably. He was a sober man for one thing; and,

though, at a distance of thirty miles from town, there was likely to be little drunkenness at any time, the other men in Tom's employ had a habit of seeking such pretence of civilisation as there was and returning to savagery in the midst of it. Horrocks alone kept clear of these occasional outbreaks, and it was noticeable that he spent his spare time in marching about the mountain side with a pick slung over his shoulder.

The district, as I have said already, was well watered, and Horrocks confined himself mainly in his solitary wanderings to the investigation of the various gullies. He was always free on Sundays, and chose those days for his fossicking expeditions. His purpose was perfectly well known and his pains were laughed at. He had had Californian experience, and was wont to declare that Mount Madagascar in many respects resembled the gold-bearing districts of that country. His lonely expeditions were all made in search of

gold, and he was quite positive that one day his labours would be rewarded.

Tom, to the derision of many, held family worship on Sundays, and invited his helpers to that solemn function. Some of them came occasionally, but Horrocks never. At earliest dawn, and sometimes even before it, he was off with his pick, and a canvas bag containing provisions for the day, and he was never back till nightfall.

On a certain Sunday evening Barton was surprised to see him striding towards the farmstead long before sundown. He came straight on, his slouching, shambling pace amounting almost to a run, and Tom, standing at his own door, pipe in mouth, turned his chin over his shoulder to tell Mary, laughingly, that here was Horrocks, and that Horrocks for once seemed in a hurry. The man came near, and Tom saw through the hirsute growth of his face that he was pale. His little grey eyes twinkled with excitement, and he threw before his employer's feet a bag of rough and

dirty canvas, the contents of which made a clash as of loose stones in falling.

‘Well, Horrocks,’ said Tom, ‘what’s the matter?’

‘The matter is,’ said Horrocks, ‘I’ve found somethin’. I ain’t found what I was lookin’ for—at least I ain’t found exactly that—but I’ve lighted on somethin’ that’s nigh on as good, an’ so I tell you.’

Horrocks’ particular craze had long been a matter of amusement to Barton, but there was something in the man’s manner which was too striking and impressive for mere laughter.

‘What have you found?’ Tom asked quietly.

Horrocks put up the back of his freckled and sun-burnt hand and wiped his mouth with it slowly, keeping his twinkling eyes fixed on his employer the while.

‘Look here, boss,’ he said, ‘I’ve always found you a square man, and I believe you’ll do the square thing by me. I shall look for

it, and so I tell you. This thing is on your land, and it ain't a thing they'll make a rush for. If it was gold they wouldn't care a cent whose land it was. You'd have an army on it in less than no time. It ain't gold, but I've seen it open out a hundred times better, and that's what it's going to do here. Now mind,' said Horrocks, 'make no mistake about it, I'm tellin' you.'

'What have you found?' Tom demanded, growing a little excited.

'I think,' Horrocks answered, evasively, 'that I've found a square man, but I want to be sure o' that before I say anythin'.'

He spat upon his red hand, wiped the palm dry on his clay-stained trousers, and then held it out towards Barton.

'Put that there,' he said, and Tom, accepting his invitation, surrendered his own hand. The other grasped it slowly and strongly, looking him in the face meanwhile.

'I don't ask you for nothin' unfair, Boss,'

he declared. 'I only want you to promise that I shayn't be left out.' He was quite cool to look at, but he was excited, nevertheless. 'That's all I want,' said Horrocks, gripping the hand he held a little harder. 'That's enough for me.'

'Well,' said Tom, 'what is it?'

'It's millions,' said Horrocks, slowly and deliberately, grasping him yet a little harder. 'Millions, that's what it is.'

Tom, in spite of himself, began to tremble. Horrocks released his hand, stooped for the bag he had cast down, and began fumblingly to untie the string which bound it at the neck. Finding this a task of some difficulty, he knelt on the ground, resting the bag upon his knee. It still resisting his efforts, he fell upon it with a sudden burst of frenzy, and worried the string with his teeth until he loosened it. Then, still kneeling, he groped in the bag with both hands and offered to Barton half-a-dozen specimens.

'Take that brown 'un first,' he said.

‘Look at it, heft it. Do you know what that is?’

‘No,’ said Tom, fingering the thing doubtfully, and with a shade of disappointment on his face. ‘I don’t know. What is it?’

‘Cinnabar,’ said Horrocks, rising to his feet and declaiming awkwardly with both hands.

‘Cinnabar?’ said Tom, as if doubtfully tasting the word. ‘Cinnabar?’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Horrocks, continuing without a pause, ‘that’s cinnabar, and it’s one of the noblest metals you’ll find anywhere in the bowels of the earth. It’s a thing maybe you never heard of, but I know where there’s tons of it—tons, and tons, and tons. D’ye hear? I tell you that if we work that out square and straight you can buy this thundering island.’

‘But,’ said Tom, still governing himself, and refusing to be too credulous about this astonishing news, ‘are you sure? Do you know what you’re talking about?’

'Do I?' said Horrocks, suddenly cold and sarcastic in manner. 'Do I know what I'm talking about? Well, yes, sir, I guess I do. Some! Ther's no kind o' precious metal I ain't prospected for. Ther's no kind o' precious metal I ain't found. Ther's no kind o' minin' in precious metals that I ain't worked at. You can play your pile on me. Lay it all, every red cent of it; I've got a royal flush by the living holy, and I tell you there's millions and millions on the table.'

There was at least no mistaking the man's enthusiasm and certainty, and Tom caught fire at it. There is hardly a creature in the world, however ascetic he may be, however limited his own desires, whatever his scorn of mere vulgar wealth, who would not thrill, if only for a moment, at the sudden news that potentialities of great wealth were in his hands.

Mary, except that she had answered Tom with a smile, had taken no notice of his announcement of the messenger who brought

this extraordinary intelligence. Horrocks was a familiar figure, and, on the whole, a rather laughable one. The mere announcement that Horrocks was in a hurry was in itself unexciting, and she had gone about her household affairs without giving a moment's thought to him. But now her husband called her from without in a loud, quavering voice.

‘Mary! Mary! Come here!’

The tone brought her to the door in a twinkling, and there were Tom and Horrocks glowering over a little handful of commonplace-looking pebbles and of earthy rock.

‘Tom!’ she cried, ‘what’s the matter?’

‘Ask Horrocks,’ Tom responded. She turned her inquiring gaze upon the man, who held out in the dirty palm of his left hand a piece of what looked like hard brown earth. Horrocks was cool again and spoke in a composed voice, drawling perhaps a trifle more than usual.

‘That’s cinnabar,’ he said. ‘It’s easier to

mine that metal than any other in the world. You can just dig it up, hoist it into a waggon, and drive it away and ship it. It's worth six hundred dollars a ton in the rough, and I'm going to swear that there's acres of it on this land.'

Mary gave a little incredulous laugh, but the statement took Tom's breath away. Horrocks had convinced him already.

'You've got silver, too,' said Horrocks, 'chunks of it. I've known that for a long while. Whether it's worth getting or no I can't tell yet, and I haven't spoken about it because silver's a thing it takes a lot of capital to work; but here,' he continued, throwing up two or three brown specimens at once, and catching them all with great dexterity, 'here's your capital and no mistake. You needn't care a dern about the silver, I tell you, you're worth millions, and there's an end of it.'

He had grown a little wild again, and wiping the back of his hand across his mouth

once more, he cooled, and said, with ridiculous solemnity, 'I've not taken whisky for full a year. I haven't wanted it. It's a thing I take no stock in as a general rule, but if there's any handy I'd like to taste it, boss. I feel to want it, boss. I've had this thing on my mind'—he opened his hand to display the specimen as he spoke—'for four hours, and not a soul to speak about it to. Now that's a trying thing when you come to think about it, and I don't scruple to allow I feel a trifle down.'

'You shall have a glass of whisky, Horrocks,' Tom replied. He was sternly abstemious, but when he had first entered upon possession of the homestead he had laid in a store of spirits in case of sudden illness. It had remained unopened until that moment, and now was broached for the discovery. Mary was yet unconvinced, and the demand for whisky made her almost altogether sceptical. She had, too, the old-fashioned English reverence for Sunday, and felt as if there were

a sort of profanity in grasping after riches on that day.

'Leave it till to-morrow, Tom,' she besought her husband. 'You don't know anything about these things, and it may turn out to be nothing after all. Don't think about it on a Sunday.'

But Tom was not yet to be drawn from the contemplation of the specimens, and he and Horrocks remained outside discussing them and reviewing all the possibilities of the future.

'If you like,' said Horrocks, 'I'll walk down to Hobart with one or two of these. There's a chap there who takes himself to be a metallist. I guess he ain't big shucks on me; but he's reckoned a big one, and perhaps the missis there will take his word when she won't take mine. She's welcome. I ain't proud, but I tell you, boss, I'm going to be. You see me in a twelvemonth's time, and there ain't a metallist from here to San Francisco that I'd live in the same street

with. 'And mind you,' he added, laying a hand on Barton's arm, 'I'm asking nothing that ain't fair and square. I shall trust you to act like a white man, that's all.'

'You may trust me,' Tom answered. 'I shall deal fair and square with you—I'm Stafford.'

'What's Stafford?' asked Horrocks.

'I'm a Stafford man,' said Tom. 'I come from Staffordshire, in England.'

'And Stafford stands for straight, I take it?' inquired Horrocks.

'Yes,' said Tom; 'Stafford stands for straight. The land's mine, and if your news turns out true, I shall have to find the money and the labour; but neither the money, nor the labour, nor the land would have been a lot of use to me if you hadn't been here to help. Look here, a third for the land, a third for the labour, a third for the discovery. What do you say to that?'

'Put it there,' returned Horrocks, ex-

tending his hand once more. Tom shook hands again. 'It's more than I expected, but it ain't more than you can afford. I'm going to be a millionaire, and you are going to be twice as rich as me. That's settled. You see, when it comes to piles like this, it's enough to have a share in it. What the share is it don't matter.'

In these terms the bargain was concluded, and it is a noticeable thing that the partnership by which the great cinnabar mine of Mount Madagascar was worked for so many years never received any further ratification. The despised professional metallurgist at Hobart was consulted, and fully confirmed the estimate of the discoverer of the mine. It is hardly necessary to say that the land was not sold, or that Tom Barton became instantly a man of consequence. It was evident there was no going back to England for a while, and the original term of little Michael's division from his parents had to be for the present indefinitely length-

ened. Mary rebelled against this at first, but by-and-by was all in favour of it.

‘Tom,’ she said one night, as she and her husband sat together in the old room which had grown sacred to them by reason of the associations which surrounded it, ‘Heaven’s going to bless us with riches.’

‘Yes, my dear,’ said Tom; ‘that’s so. We’re going to be richer than I ever wanted to be, and my constant hope and prayer is that it won’t spoil us.’

‘It won’t spoil you, Tom,’ his wife answered, lovingly and admiringly. ‘And I think,’ she added more seriously, ‘that it won’t spoil me.’

CHAPTER XII

‘MR. J. DENTON, D.C.L., Athenæum Club, London.’ The postmaster of Hobart Town read the card laid on the rough counter before him, shying a little at the word ‘Athenæum,’ and then looked up at his visitor.

‘Any letters for me? That’s my name.’

‘No letters, sir,’ the postmaster responded.

‘Tell me,’ said the visitor, ‘if you know a Mr. Barton hereabouts—a Mr. Thomas Barton.’

‘Barton of Mount Madagascar?’ said the postmaster.

‘That’s the man,’ Denton answered. ‘How far is he away from here?’

‘About thirty miles,’ said the postmaster. ‘A pretty good track. If you’re thinking of

going up that way I can let you have a buggy, a pair of horses, and a driver. That's in my line of business.'

' You may order the conveyance at once,' said Denton. Then, leaning both elbows on the counter, he fell into conversation with the postmaster.

' You know this Barton?'

' Oh, yes,' the postmaster admitted, ' I know him. Not to say actually know him—not to be familiar with him. We pass a word or two together now and then. There's nothing stuck up about Barton, and that's what we like him for.'

' Oh,' said Denton, with a grave uplifting of his eyebrows, ' there's nothing stuck up about Barton? He's popular, isn't he?'

' I shouldn't say,' returned the postmaster, ' that there's any man better respected or more liked in the colony than Tom Barton. " Honest Tom" they've took to call him. He's making money by the hatful.'

' Married man, I believe?' said Denton.

‘Married man, sir,’ the postmaster answered.

‘Any children?’

‘There was a child,’ said the postmaster, ‘but Mr. Dogdyke, the Governor’s private secretary, took charge of it, and took it away to England nigh upon four years agone. Halloa, you Jim!’ he cried, suddenly, breaking from behind the counter and dashing into the street. ‘Here’s a gentleman wants to get up to Barton’s at Mount Madagascar. Just get the horses into the buggy, will you?’

‘All right,’ said the man thus addressed, and disappeared into a ramshackle little building on the other side of the street. The postmaster lounged back again and renewed the conversation.

‘Landed this morning from the “Europa,” sir?’

‘Yes,’ Denton returned. ‘I came in the “Europa.”’

‘Fine boat,’ said the postmaster.

Denton nodded. The official found the conversation begin to languish, and returned to his duties. Denton sauntered into the street and awaited the arrival of the buggy. It came up in two or three minutes; a rough, serviceable vehicle, drawn by two sinewy, shaggy horses, and directed by a brigandish-looking person in a red shirt and a slouched wideawake and high boots. Denton entered the vehicle, bearing a small hand-bag with him. The driver gathered up the reins, and was just about to start when the postmaster issued from his place of business with the mail-bag.

‘Catch that,’ he cried: ‘Barton’s letters. There’ll be nobody going up for a week, and you may as well take them. There’s this morning’s mail there as well.’

The driver dexterously caught the bag, threw it into the interior of the buggy, and gave his horses the signal for the start.

Three years had gone by since Horrocks had made his great discovery, and now

between the town and Mount Madagascar there was a moderately good track. The unaccustomed traveller occasionally experienced a shock ; but those who were used to the road looked on it as making a reasonable approach towards perfection. It was in no place steeper than the roof of an ordinary house, and there were not above two or three hundred holes in the whole thirty miles in which it would have been possible to bury a grand piano.

Four hours' drive brought the traveller to his destination, and he alighted in front of a substantial house of wood with a large verandah. The place had a look of rather desolate newness as yet, but it was solidly built and stood in the midst of an inclosure, surrounded by wooden palings, in which some attempt had already been made to reduce the land to the semblance of a garden. A couple of men were working at it when Denton stepped from the buggy. He walked through the gate and up the steps leading to the

verandah. The door was open, but, finding no bell or knocker, he rapped on the wood-work with the handle of the umbrella he carried.

‘Come in,’ cried a manly voice, and, obeying this injunction, Denton marched into the hall and along the unclothed floor to a side room from which the voice had proceeded. There, at a desk, sat a great broad-shouldered fellow, dressed in a suit of grey flannel and wearing a wideawake perched at the back of his head. He was tanned so deeply by the sun that his grey-blue eyes looked almost white by contrast, and a huge moustache and great russet beard so effectually disguised him that Denton made no guess as to his identity, though he had almost made sure of the voice.

‘This is Mr. Barton’s house, I believe?’

‘This *is* Mr. Barton’s house,’ said the bearded man, rising and advancing, ‘and there’s no one in the wide world more welcome to it than Mr. Denton.’ His face

broke into a delighted smile, and he held out a hard brown hand in welcome.

Denton took it heartily, and looking up at his tanned and bearded face, nodded twice or thrice to express his own amazement. 'Barton, I shouldn't have known you, though I thought myself rather good at recalling faces.'

'You're a sight for sore eyes,' said Tom. 'But whatever brings you, sir, into this out-of-the-way corner of the world?'

'My health broke down,' Denton answered. 'My doctor ordered me away for a long sea voyage, and I thought I couldn't do better than have a look at the colonies. I've been through Australia already. I arrived here from Melbourne this morning, and I'm off in a fortnight to have a look at New Zealand. I came here by way of the Cape of Good Hope, and shall go back by Cape Horn, and so you see I shall have made the tour of the world.'

'But where's your luggage, Mr. Denton?'

'I left it at Hobart.'

'I'll see to that at once,' said Tom, and, striding to the door, he hailed the driver. 'Come in here, Jim ! This gentleman 'll tell you what's wanted. You can get a fresh pair of horses when you get down to Hobart. Get the things up to-night somehow. We'll find a shakedown for you, and you can get back in the mornin'.'

'Nonsense,' said Mr. Denton.

'Nonsense,' Tom echoed. 'We're not going to let you out of our hands yet awhile, you be sure. I'll go and fetch the missis. She'll be right-down glad to see you. Wait here a bit.'

Away marched Tom to tell the news, and Denton looked after his sturdy, manly figure with an eye of friendship and approval. By-and-by Mary came, fresh, neat, and blooming, as he had seen her in the little cottage at home at Heydon Hay. There was a renewal of greeting, and the three sat down to talk.

'The Lord has seen fit to bless us,' said Tom. 'It's a queer thing, sir, but it looked

like ruin and a broken heart. You remember, Mr. Denton? And now just look round and see what's come of it. I'm a rich man, sir; I am a very rich man. And I'm going to be still richer.'

' You'll be coming back to England shortly, Barton, won't you ? ' Denton asked him.

' There's nothing I should like better,' Tom answered. His face clouded a little as he spoke, and his frank grey eyes wandered somewhat uncertainly.

' I should like to go back and see the folks. I should like to see the old place again, but I'm a bit uncertain. I can't fix my mind about it anyhow, nor yet can't the missis.'

' I can assure you,' said Denton, ' that there's nothing but respect and sympathy waiting for you. The first news of your good fortune reached England just a month or two before I came away, and everybody who knew you was rejoicing over it. They seemed to think that your good fortune is a kind of payment for undeserved suffering.'

‘There’s no good fortune that’ll ever pay for that, Mr. Denton,’ said Mary quietly. ‘We’re not unthankful, either of us ; and that time’s dead and done with. But we can’t forget it.’

She spoke with perfect quiet, but there was something in her voice which kept Denton silent for a moment. She went on again :

‘Tom makes believe to think, sir, that we shall go back to England some time, but we never shall.’

‘Oh, I hope so,’ said Denton, ‘I hope so. There’s nothing to keep you away, surely.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Mary ; ‘there’s a many things to keep us away. There’s one thing in particular.’

‘Indeed,’ said the barrister rather awkwardly, ‘and—’

‘What the missis means is this,’ said Tom, leaning his elbows on his knees and taking his bearded chin between both palms. ‘She won’t mind my telling it to an old friend like you, sir. You’ll excuse my saying that, Mr.

Denton, but we look on you as an old friend here, and we haven't forgot your letter, nor yet what you did for us both at home.'

'Never mind all that,' interposed Denton, hastily.

'We do mind it,' said Tom, 'though if you'd rather I didn't I'll say no more about it. But here's the plain fact, sir. We sent our little boy to England, a matter of three and a half years ago. It was a sore wrench to part with him, more especially for the missis, but we sent him for his good. You see, sir, it's like this.' He was evidently ill at ease, and to Denton's shrewd observation it looked as if he were trying to present a case for which he himself had little value—as if he were offering an argument which had no weight with him. 'It's like this, sir. There's a blot upon my name, and though I don't think it amounts to much amongst the folks as know me, it amounts to everythin' amongst the folks as don't know me. Any man at any minute can point me out and say, "There goes

Tom Barton, the convict ; he's rich now, made money out in Van Diemen's Land, but he's an old lag all the same, and served his seven years' transportation." Now, you see, sir, I've got to put up with that, and the missis has got to put up with it likewise. We've squared our shoulders to endure it. But there's the boy. *He* hasn't squared his shoulders to endure it, and we've made up our minds that he shan't be pointed to as our child.'

' You've surrendered the boy altogether ? ' cried Denton in astonishment.

' We hope not,' Barton answered. ' We hope that when he comes to manhood we'll be able to tell him, if we should live so long, and that he won't value us any lightlier for what we've done. It's been for his good, Mr. Denton, and it's been a sore matter to us. Perhaps—I don't know—but perhaps if I could get away to America—you see, the lad's in England under my mother's name. My mother was a Hawthorne, and we christened him Michael Hawthorne. Now, I've thought

it over, and it seems to me a man's got as much right to his mother's name as he has to his father's. If I could get away to America —plain Tom Hawthorne—I might get the boy with me, and nobody'd know where we'd come from. But then, you see, sir, there's another matter. Where's this property going? Lord knows I don't want money for myself. We've got enough already, and more than enough to last our lifetime, but it's a sort of a trust.'

‘A trust?’ said Denton, questioningly.

‘Yes,’ said Tom, ‘it's a sort of a trust. It's a trust for the boy. Now look you here, sir, here's what the missis thinks. We've brought that boy into the world. He's got a father and mother as love him too well to dare to own him. He's robbed of a mother's love —robbed of a father's care. Now we owe that lad something, don't you think? Ain't it my plain duty to do all I can to smooth his path for him, and to give him a fair, bright chance in the world? That's how we look at it.’

Denton, on his first arrival, had carried in the mail-bag as well as his own valise, and they now lay on the table within reach of Barton's hand. He took it up presently, and drawing a bunch of keys from his pocket, selected the one which opened the bag, and began absently to turn over his correspondence.

'There's the newspapers for you, Mary,' he said, rising and handing the packet to his wife, 'and here's a letter in her ladyship's own writing. Here's one for me from Sir Ferdinand. It's pleasant,' he added, turning to his guest, 'to find that old friends don't forget us.'

'Do you know, Barton,' said Denton, anxious to escape from the sense of awkwardness which seemed to have fallen on them all, 'you're quite like a breath of Old England.'

'As how?' Tom asked.

'That good old-fashioned midland accent of yours,' returned Denton. 'I should have

thought you would have forgotten what you had by this time, but to my mind it's twice as marked as ever.'

'Is it now?' said Tom. 'Well, now you come to say so, I suppose it is. I found a kind of comfort in it, and I daresay I thickened it a bit without thinkin' on it. Then, besides that, it don't do to give these chaps here as I've got under me any fine-mouthed sort o' lingo. They want plain straightfor'ard talk, and the plainer it is the better they like it.'

'You notice the old tone, Mrs. Barton, don't you?'

'Notice!' responded Mary, with half a laugh. 'Tom's getting to be a regular bear. We sit down of a night sometimes, and Tom says to me, "Now, my dear, let's have a bit of Castle Barfield," and he'll talk just as broad as he can all night. I tell him, if ever we get back to a place where it matters, he won't be able to talk fit to be listened to.'

'Why, you're catching the accent, too,

cried Denton, laughing outright, for Mary had fallen insensibly into the echo of her husband's homely tones.

She laughed a little, and half blushed, and then answered in the broadest Barfield drawl, 'I beant ashaamed on it.'

There was a general laugh at this, and Mrs. Barton rose to see about accommodation for her guest. She carried the packet of newspapers with her, and Tom and Denton strolled out together for half-an-hour, for a talk and a smoke, pending the preparation of the mid-day dinner. A rough Irish domestic was the only serving woman so far in the household, and she surprised Tom on his return by the statement that Mrs. Barton had gone to her bedroom and begged to be excused from the table.

'Why,' cried Tom, 'what's the matter?'

'Oi don't know what the matther is,' the girl blurted out, 'she's crying watherspouts, but what it's for, sorra one o' me knows.'

With a hurried word to Denton, Barton

ran to his wife's room, and, finding the door locked against him, rapped softly for admission. He had to knock more and yet more urgently before his summons was answered, and when at last the door was opened, Mary faced him tear-stained and dishevelled.

'Why, Mary, my darlin',' said Tom, 'what is it? No—no bad news from home? Nothin' wrong with the boy?'

His voice trembled as he questioned her.

'No,' she answered, 'there's nothing wrong with the boy. Don't mind me, Tom; I'm a weak, foolish creature'

'Neither weak nor foolish,' said Tom, stoutly and yet tenderly. 'Tell me what troubles you.'

Three or four crumpled newspapers lay upon the bed, which still bore the impress of his wife's figure. The upper newspaper was wet with tears. She took it quietly from its place and handed it to her husband.

'That's all, Tom,' she said, 'I hadn't ought to have made a fuss about it, but there it is.'

I don't suppose anybody sent it in spite, but it's in all these papers.'

Tom's eyes caught an article of two-thirds of a column in length, roughly marked out in ink, and headed 'A Convict Millionaire.' Glancing down the column he saw his own name again and again repeated. He was not, as a rule, a rapid reader, but now, in his excitement, he made out, almost at a glance, that the article set forth the history of his conviction and his recent rise to wealth.

'My dear,' he said, 'this don't matter to us.'

'Matter!' she cried. 'Doesn't it matter to the boy? The convict millionaire! Don't you see, Tom, that your name's everywhere? Don't you see you can't hide yourself? Don't you see it marks the boy as well as you? "The convict's brat!" Oh, Tom, Tom, I wish he'd never been born.'

Tom let her have her cry out, only laying a caressing hand upon her shoulder now and again; and when she had recovered self-

control, he gathered up the newspapers and rejoined Denton.

'The missis is a bit upset,' he said, simply. 'That's done it,' he added, displaying the article. 'Don't bother to read it now, Mr. Denton, but sit down to dinner; we'll have a talk about it afterwards.'

The meal was not yet over when Mary joined them. She was quite composed again, and nothing but a slight pallor remained as a sign of her recent agitation.

'I want to talk to Mr. Denton,' she said, when the table was cleared.

'I am at your service, Mrs. Barton,' returned the barrister.

'You promised help to us, Mr. Denton,' she began, 'if you could ever give it.'

'I did,' he answered; 'and I am ready to fulfil my promise.'

'You have read these?' she asked, holding up one of the newspapers. 'Mr. Denton, we shall never see our child again, or, if we do, he'll never know his father and his

mother. Tom's rich; he can pay anything. The boy must be brought up like a Christian gentleman; he must never know who he is, or what we are, or where his name comes from. He'll have plenty of money. Will you take charge of him? I don't mean to burden you. I don't mean to trouble you. But will you watch over him? Will you see that he gets good schooling? Will you see that he's well looked after, that he's put into the hands of good people, who'll love him and care for him, not like his mother would, but like good folks, who'll have pity on a helpless orphan? We're plain, stupid people, Tom and me. We've raked our brains, nights and nights, to try and see how we can keep the truth away from him when he grows up to be a man.'

'I'd rather he knew it,' Tom murmured gravely.

'He shan't know it,' his wife cried. 'He shall never know it, if I can help it. Oh, Mr. Denton, will you help me? Think of

it ! It don't come easy to a mother's heart to say, "I'll never see my child again," but will you, will you help me for his sake ? You're a clever man, Mr. Denton. You can make up a tale that plain folks like us can't think about. Will you do it ? '

'Mrs. Barton,' returned Denton ; 'let me talk over this matter with your husband. If he consents I'll do anything in my power.'

'Consent !' said Tom. 'I don't see why I shouldn't. It's a thing as can always be undone if the missis should ever come to wish it. And in the meantime it's as good a plan as any, better perhaps than any. If you'll oblige my wife in this matter, I shall take it as a favour, sir.'

'Very well,' said Denton ; 'we'll count that as a bargain.'

CHAPTER XIII

WE have passed over a space of twenty years in time. We are away from the wilds of Tasmania, and find ourselves in civilised Potts Point. Potts Point is the Belgravia of Sydney, and Sydney, as most of the world knows, is the capital city of New South Wales, the parent city of that great Antipodean continent which will one day have its word to speak in the history of the world. We are on the lawn of the Grampians, overlooking the beautiful harbour. The waters of the harbour smile and ripple in the summer sunlight, for we are nearing Christmas. The weather, though hot, is crisp and clear, and that for Sydney is a delicious rarity. The sun shines out in southern majesty, and the sea is all sapphire and emerald. There are the gaily-striped marquees

on the lawn of the Grampians, and the parasols of the ladies, waving hither and thither in the brilliant air, look like so many enormous, gaily-tinted butterflies. The dresses are all of the brightest and newest fashions, the whole scene palpitates with light and colour.

The Governor is present, and so is his friend General Mallard, so that the society of Potts Point is doubly blessed. General Mallard is an estimable gentleman, who has served his country in the field right nobly, and who now does his honest feeble best to serve her in Parliament.

General Mallard, not a particularly distinguished-looking man, goes with a halt in his gait, a dot-and-go-one motion which sometimes excites ridicule in the minds of those who are not aware of his military reputation. When he appears in uniform and the Victoria Cross shows on his scarlet tunic, people forget to smile at the oddness of his walk. But the wound which gives that peculiarity was received, as a matter of fact, a year or two

before the General had ever smelt powder in action.

The General has seen only half a century of life, but looks already venerable, being aged by hard fighting, many sicknesses, and many injuries received in battle. He is accompanied by his daughter Clara, and is travelling with her to enlarge her mind by a contemplation of the devoted loyalty of colonial people to the British crown and constitution. Gentlemen of General Mallard's standing, who travel in the colonies, form, as a rule, the sweetest opinion on this topic.

It is certain, at least, that Potts Point and Toorak are friendly to the whole race of distinguished people, and it is easy to forget that Potts Point and Toorak are not Australia.

Miss Mallard was, and is, as good and pretty a girl as a man might wish to meet; as frank and as honest as a boy, and in love with the whole of the wide, wide world and its inhabitants. The General, her father, was proud of her, as he had a right to be, and she

ruled him with a rod of sunbeams. Forty young men at the garden party at the Grampians were in love with her more or less. They drank champagne in the big marquee, avoided conversation, and brooded darkly on the vileness of all social divisions.

The Governor's party made a little group and had a little court around it. The inner circle included the General and his daughter, and Mr. Michael Hawthorne, a young gentleman from home. He was a frank and genial fellow of perhaps six and twenty, who should have been a very happy young man indeed, for he was worth two millions sterling solid, was in the very pink of health and condition, of a most equable and cheerful temper, and was head over ears in love. He had come from England in the wake of Miss Mallard, ostensibly with the intent of inquiring into certain properties belonging to him, but in reality to be near her. He had long since made up his mind to speak, but had not yet found the words.

General Mallard was not a distinguished man to look at, though undeniably a gentleman. The Governor, though undeniably a gentleman also, had no personal cachet of superiority to the rest of the world. But a personage who swaggered in the outer ring looked as imposing as a dozen governors rolled into one, and was evidently a someone, if only in his own opinion. He was dressed in a lavender frock-coat and lavender trousers, and he wore a waistcoat of watered silk, across which trailed a great gold chain. His shoes, his gloves, his hat, all matched the lavender tone of coat and trousers to a shade. His scarf was of delicate blue, and was fastened by a cameo ring. He was inclined to be tall, and more than inclined to be portly. His hair had once been flaxen, and was now fading to that no-colour which in people of his complexion is the prelude to the first sign of grey. He wore it long, and it curled inwards at the ends. His cheeks were fat; his huge moustache curved over to obscure his mouth; he

had shaggy eyebrows and blue eyes—china blue, and cruel in expression. He wore spectacles which had a broad gold rim, and from head to foot of the man his nationality declared itself.

‘I met the young chentleman in Europe,’ he was saying, addressing a small group of listeners. ‘I was aple to be of some little service to him in Berlin. It is a troll thing, is it not, that a poor Cherman chentleman who never did a stroke of pusiness in his life should find himself in a position to save a millionaire from trouble about his hotel pill?’

‘Trouble about his hotel bill?’ asked one of his listeners, with a laugh of incredulity.

‘Strange, is it not?’ said the Count von Herder, sliding the cameo ring a little up and down his scarf with a gloved thumb and finger.

‘Strange, beyond a doubt,’ said a little high-dried old gentleman at the Count’s elbow. ‘But true, eh, Count? I think you and I know all about that transaction.’

‘Ah !’ cried the Count, prolonging the word in a rapturous falsette. ‘The good Mr. Denton ! I am delighted to renew our acquaintance.’ He shook hands and tapped the high-dried old gentleman on the shoulders and the elbows, to signify his extreme pleasure at this encounter. ‘But, Sydney, my dear Mr. Denton ?’ he asked, bending forward and smiling, as he touched the old gentleman’s elbows again. ‘Sydney is a lonk vay from anywhere. Eh ! Not ?’

‘I am living here,’ said the old gentleman, very simply and quietly. His manner was in strange contrast with the other’s efflorescence.

‘Oh !’ cried the Count, ‘you live here ? Oh ! So ?’

He seemed disconcerted for the moment, but recovered himself almost immediately. Perhaps he felt it awkward to have offered so warm a welcome to a gentleman whose dwelling-place he had forgotten.

‘That was a very interesting episode,’ said Mr. Denton. ‘Tell the story, Count ; it

will interest your friends very much, I am quite sure.'

Mr. Denton was a clean-shaven old gentleman with a hawkish nose. He was deliberately old-fashioned in dress, and adhered still to the tall collars and the stock which had been the mode in his youth. He had a habit of crossing his two forefingers whilst he talked, and a look of ticking off his phrases and opinions. His face was kindly, but he looked as sharp as a needle. The carriage of the head—shoulders drooping and chin poked up a little—gave him the air of a man willing to pry into things. It was hard not to credit him with more than a fair share of curiosity—impossible not to credit him with at least a fair share of sagacity. Perhaps it was only manner, but he perked his chin and cocked his sagacious eye at the fat German in a way which seemed to convey something of a challenge.

'Vell,' said Count von Herder, 'it is a little story. Mr. Hawthorne was ropt at his

hotel. Somebody walked into his betroom and stole all his money and all his chewels. He made a row about it, of course, and the landlord refused to believe him. He said it was a tevice to escape from paying his pill. The young chentleman was furious. There was a noisy quarrel. The police were brought in. I happened to enter at the moment. I addressed them all and calmed them. I said, "I am a chentleman, and when I see a chentleman I know him. What is the amount of the pill?" They told me. It was a drifle— twenty or thirty bounds. I took the money from my pocket-book, I paid the pill. There was an end of the matter.'

'Not exactly the end, I should suppose,' said Mr. Denton. 'That little service should have made Hawthorne very much your friend.'

'Of course,' said von Herder. 'Of course.'

'I remember,' pursued the old gentleman, that when I got to Berlin next day I found him quite boiling over with gratitude. He

was little more than a lad at that time. Very generous, very grateful to anybody who served him ; very confiding. Extremely confiding. Now don't you think, Count, that he was really a little bit too confiding ? '

' It is a garaderisdig of youth,' said the Count, smilingly. ' A very lofely point of garader. There is nothing I admire so much as simplicity.'

' I know it, my dear Count,' said Denton, ' I was sure of it before you spoke. By the way, you spent some trouble in trying to find the thief, didn't you ? '

' Vell, yes,' said Von Herder, ' nadurally ; I was interested. I set the police to watch, but nothing came of it.'

' Nothing ? ' said Denton.

' Nothing,' echoed the Count.

' That was a bit of a pity, wasn't it ? You'd naturally have liked to have had the rascal caught.'

' I think,' said the Count, ' that we were all equally interested.'

‘Very likely. Oh ! by the way, Count, when can you spare me five minutes ? ’

‘I am at your service, my goot Mr. Denton, at any moment. Shall we say now ? ’

‘Thank you very much,’ said the old gentleman, ‘I should like a word with you.’

The Count seized his hat with a flourish, bringing both heels together at the same instant, and having thus made his adieux to the little knot of listeners, he laid an affectionate hand upon Denton’s shoulder and swaggered off with him across the lawn.

‘Count Wolfgang von Herder,’ said Mr. Denton, ‘you had better go.’

‘My dear, goot outspoken Denton,’ the Count answered, ‘you are quite mistaken. You inoculated our esteemed and mutual younk friend with certain opinions to my prechutice. Very well. Now I am going to show you that our younk friend is amenable to reason. Mr. Michael Hawthorne is apout to introduce me to the Covernor.’

‘Indeed,’ said Denton, looking up at him

half humorously, half disdainfully. 'Who says so?'

'I say so,' returned Von Herder; 'I am in a position to clear myself absolutely of the absurdt charge you brought against me. I condescent to clear myself—it is a condescension, mindt you—because I like the boy, and because he can be useful to me. Here I know nopoly. He knows everypody. You know my little social vays—eh? I hate to be py myself. I do not like my own gompany.'

'Nobody cares greatly for your company,' said Denton. 'The owner of this house is my very good old friend. I don't know how he came to be inveigled into giving you an invitation, but I'll take care that this is your last.'

'My dear goot sir,' returned the Count, 'you do not guess how much you are mistaken.' He smiled with great sweetness, and bent forward to touch the old gentleman once more on both elbows. 'You shall see with your own eyes. Mr. Michael Hawthorne will

introduce me at the reception at Covernment House to-morrow. He will introduce me to the Covernor personally as his dear friendt. He will introduce me to Cheneral Mallard. He will introduce me to Cheneral Mallard's lofely daughter. You shall see how far repentance for unjust suspicion will carry him.'

'Will you kindly consider yourself for the meantime as being ordered off this ground?' asked Denton. 'Or shall I give the servants instructions for your removal?'

'Now, now, now!' cried Von Herder, with a most amiable smile. 'Vy should we talk like this? I tell you, my dear goot friendt, that to-morrow Mr. Hawthorne will retract his suspicions to you, and will introduce me to the first society of the city. Vy not vait and see? Eh? Is it not reasonaple?'

'I wish you good day, Count von Herder,' said the old gentleman with remarkable dryness. 'I shall take steps for your immediate removal.'

‘Fery well,’ cried the Count, apparently unmoved. ‘Fery well, my dear Denton. You shall do exactly what you like, but really you are too imbetuous !’

Mr. Denton marched off without further words, and the Count watched him as he crossed the lawn to where the host was standing in the centre of a little group of men, for whom a liveried servant was in the act of pouring out claret cup from a large silver jug.

‘A word with you,’ cried Denton, and the master of the place slid apart to him, glass in hand ; a cheery, beaming man, who looked very much at home, and at the same time extremely foreign to his surroundings.

‘What’s the row, old fellow?’ he demanded. ‘Have a drink. Horton, bring a glass to Mr. Denton. What is it, Denton?’

‘You know that fellow yonder who calls himself Count von Herder?’

‘I hear he’s a friend of General Mallard’s. That’s all I know about him.’

'Do you know who says he's a friend of General Mallard's?'

'Why, he told me so himself. Is there anything wrong about the fellow?'

'He inaugurated his acquaintance with me by robbing a friend of mine of a thousand pounds in money and jewellery, and then by lending him enough to pay his hotel bill. I've just told him that I'd give the servants instructions for his removal.'

'No, no, Denton, we won't have a row. I'll tell him. Come along.'

The host was a huge burly man with a long beard streaked with grey, and a face tanned with many years' exposure to the sun. His accent had a touch of mid-England in it, and his whole bearing was that of a man who was accustomed to have his way and to be regarded as one in authority.

'I think,' said Denton, 'you had better authorise me to speak to the fellow and to take one of the servants to him. I'll guarantee that there shall be no scene.'

‘Oh !’ cried the host, ‘I’ll fix the fellow. Come with me.’

They marched across the lawn together to where Count von Herder awaited the on-coming of the foe with a self-composure almost perfect. There was perhaps too much swagger in it, but there was hardly a sign of embarrassment in his face, and the smile with which he treated Denton was really very natural to look at. An innocent man might have worn it under such a charge as was being brought against him: but an innocent man would have needed a great deal of humour and courage, and perhaps a little more practice than innocence would be likely to acquire.

‘Look here, Denton,’ said the host, as they crossed the lawn together towards the smiling Von Herder, ‘is there any chance of your being mistaken?’

‘No,’ said Denton, with an almost snapping distinctness, ‘none whatever.’

'All right,' said the other, 'I'll root him out at once. Look here'—this to the Count, who raised his hat and drew his heels together, 'I'm told you're a scoundrel, and I think you'd better shift.'

'Pardon me,' said the Count, with an air of great curiosity, 'you're told I am——'

'A scoundrel.' The host was so obliging as to repeat himself. 'And I think you'd better shift.'

'Ah!' cried Von Herder. 'You haf heard that from my goot Denton here.'

'Exactly,' said Denton. 'He has heard it from me.'

From a little distance the trio looked as amicable as possible. The Count's smile was quite deceptive a yard or two away, and nothing but a little flush of colour under the eyes, and a slight tendency to a suffusion of blood in the white of the eyes themselves, betrayed a touch of discomfiture. The host had carried a glass of claret cup with him,

and sipped at it calmly as he spoke the accusing words.

‘Very well, chentlemen,’ said the Count, ‘I will go. But I haf told my goot friend Denton already that Mr. Michael Hawthorne will withdraw his charge against me and will apologise.’

‘Mr. who?’ inquired the host.

Denton, without answering, for the inquiry was addressed to him, turned to the Count with an air of sudden angry determination.

‘If you speak one other word here, sir, I will have you thrown out by the servants. Go !’

The Count raised his hat, bowed, turned, and walked away.

‘Michael Hawthorne?’ said the host. ‘What did he mean about Michael Hawthorne?’

‘Take it quietly, Barton,’ said Denton, passing an arm through his. ‘Take it quietly.

I meant to have told you before. He's here.'

'Here? Where?'

'Quiet yourself for Heaven's sake, there's a good fellow. There he stands, talking to the Governor.'

CHAPTER XIV

TOM BARTON, with Denton's warning hand upon his arm, turned and looked at the group of which the Governor was the centre. Engaged in animated conversation with the great man was a bright-looking, handsome young fellow of six-and-twenty, elegantly but not foppishly attired, and evidently at his ease in the society in which he stood. His face was turned towards Barton, and at something the Governor said he laughed. At that instant a likeness to his mother flashed out in the young man's face with a distinctness so amazing that the father started at it. Denton's grip tightened on his arm.

‘Do nothing rash. Think over what you mean to do. Come with me.’

Barton took no heed at all, but kept his gaze fixed on the stranger who was so near and dear to him. That curious instinct of the eye which so often warns us of a fixed regard brought Hawthorne's gaze upon his unknown father, and the young man regarded the elder with a momentary astonishment. Barton saw this, and turned away, and Denton felt his arm tremble like a shaken twig.

'Come with me,' he urged again, and this time he was obeyed.

The old barrister led his host across the lawn, and through an open French window, into a quiet room which looked out upon a portion of the lawn where, for the time being, none of the visitors were standing. He closed the French window quietly, and turned upon his friend with a look in which commiseration and apology were blended.

'Barton,' he said gently, 'you're not yourself for the moment. You've had a greater shock than you're yet aware of.'

Barton's hands were shaking. His breath

came hard and fast, and his face, tanned as it was, had grown strangely pale.

‘I’m all right,’ he made shift to say. ‘Don’t take any notice of me ; give me just a minute.’

He took half-a-dozen turns about the room, resolutely controlling himself, and then, walking to a sideboard, poured out and drank a glass of water.

‘Now,’ he said, ‘squaring his shoulders and diving his hands deep into his pockets.

‘I’ve told you,’ said Denton, ‘that if I could have found or made an opportunity I would have warned you, but I only knew of Michael’s presence in Australia two hours ago. He wrote to me saying that he was coming out, but I only received his letter this afternoon. You know I’ve been up country for a while, and only returned to-day.’

‘What brings him here?’ asked Barton.

The mere words sounded curt and careless, and the speaker had forced himself to a resolute commonplace of tone, but his companion

could yet see and understand the agitation under which he laboured.

‘He came out,’ Denton answered—‘so I gathered from his letter—but perhaps you’d better read it for yourself.’ He unbuttoned his prim frock-coat and drew a letter from the breast pocket. I’d meant to show it to you before,’ he said quietly. ‘Perhaps you had better see it now.’

Barton drew his hand from his pocket and accepted the letter. The paper rustled in his grasp as he walked with it to the window and stood with his back to the light to read it. The letter was dated from a hotel in London, and ran thus:—

‘MY DEAR GUARDIAN,—You will be—I haven’t the slightest doubt of it in the world —amazed to learn that I am starting for Australia, and that I follow this letter by the next mail. Perhaps I shall lessen your amazement by telling you that General Mallard has accepted a commission from the Government to

inspect the colonial defences, and is travelling in the same vessel with myself. When I last saw you I took you into my confidence with respect to a matter in which you were good enough to express the kindest interest and the most friendly hopes. You advised me to wait and make quite sure of my own mind and heart. I have never known your advice to be wrong yet, and I accepted it then, as I always have done. I *have* waited, and I can't say honestly that my belief in the truth of my own sentiments has increased. Frankly, I don't believe that an increase was possible. I know my own mind no better than I did six months ago, but I don't desire to know it better. In plain English, my dear guardian, I am convinced that the happiness of my life is bound up in this matter, and I am not without hopes that the General will regard my suit with favour. He seems to be as well-disposed to me as I might wish. As to Miss Mallard herself, I am in alternate despair and hope. You are so resolute an old bachelor

yourself that I can't offer you the sentimental confidences which a more sentimental person might easily elicit from me. I can only tell you this, that the idea of being out of Miss Mallard's sight and mind for twelve months seems altogether unbearable to me. I have pretended business in Australia, and have told the General that I am eager to have a look at that Tasmanian mine which yields me so handsome a return. Honestly, I am not in the least eager to see the Tasmanian mine, but I shall have to make at least a pretence of looking at it. I will not speak if I can help it until I have seen you, but on that matter I shall not pledge myself. Within a week of your receipt of this I shall hope to meet you in Sydney. And I am now as ever,

‘Gratefully and affectionately yours,

‘MICHAEL HAWTHORNE.’

The stiff paper on which the letter was written quivered unceasingly in Barton's hands. Twice or thrice in the reading of it, brief as it

was, he paused and passed a hand across his eyes as if to clear his vision. Each time he shook his head with a certain air of dogged resolution, and when he had finished he handed the paper back to Denton, and fell to walking up and down the room again.

‘Who is this General Mallard?’ Barton asked in a little while.

‘General Mallard,’ said Denton, ‘is the man who was injured in that poaching affray in which you were supposed to be concerned more than thirty years ago.’

Barton stopped in his heavy, solid stride, turned one enigmatical look on his companion, and went on again.

‘Then he’s in love with that man’s daughter?’

‘Yes,’ said Denton, ‘he’s in love with that man’s daughter.’

Barton gave an inarticulate grunt and quickened his step a little. Denton, with his head perked on one side, and a hand on either lapel of his coat, as if he were in the act of

folding himself up like a peculiarly delicate and fragile parcel, watched him but said nothing.

‘What sort of a chap is he, this General Mallard?’ Barton asked, bringing himself to a sudden halt. ‘Chip off the old block, eh?’

‘No,’ said Denton. ‘Not at all a chip off the old block. He’s a very gallant and accomplished officer. Victoria cross man. Has distinguished himself a dozen times in action, and is a great favourite in the county.’

‘H’m,’ said Barton. ‘I hear from Sir Ferdinand now and again. He tells me nothing of him.’

‘I dare say,’ Denton answered, ‘that Sir Ferdinand imagines the theme might be disagreeable to you, and avoids it on that ground. It is, however, as I tell you. There is no one more popular, no one more esteemed or liked. The General is not a very brilliant fellow, and is a very high and dry old Tory,

but he's a thoroughly honourable and good-hearted man, and is universally esteemed. He has altogether lived down the memory of his father.'

'H'm,' said Barton again; and with that, diving his hands once more into his pockets, set out afresh upon his stolid walk to and fro.

'And the girl—what's she like?' he asked, halting as abruptly as before.

'She is here to-day,' Denton answered. 'A charming girl—high-spirited, noble-minded, a shade romantic, perhaps—not foolishly so, but still, a shade romantic.'

'A good girl?' asked Barton.

'Thoroughly,' said Denton.

'Look here!' Barton demanded, taking his companion by the shoulders and bending over him until their faces almost touched, 'what's going to be done?'

'My dear friend,' Denton answered, 'that's your affair—you must resolve on that.'

'Yes,' Tom answered, straightening him-

self; 'I must resolve on that. Let's look at things a bit. Sit down, Denton.'

Denton obeyed, and his host, taking a chair from the side of the room, whisked it over to where he sat, and planted it rather noisily before him. His prodigious personal strength showed itself as clearly in this slight action as if he had lifted a thousand times the chair's weight. He handled it as if it were a feather.

'Now,' he said, seating himself; 'let's look at things. The fact is, Denton, I've been a fool. I let myself be over-persuaded by the missis. I can't disregard her feelin's. She's been a good wife to me, Denton. A good, good wife; God never blessed man with a better. But she made a great mistake, and I was fool enough to let her make it. We never should ha' parted wi' the boy.'

'That,' said Denton, 'was my opinion from the first: but I saw your reasons for it clearly, and I know how unselfish they were.'

‘Why, as for bein’ unselfish,’ Barton answered; ‘what’s to be expected when a man’s dealin’ with his own flesh and blood? But, all the same, ’twas a mistake. Look here, if I’d never parted with him, he’d have found himself just as much respected as he is at this minute; he’d have found himself as plain Tom Barton’s son, as good a man as he is now, with every bit as good chances in the world.’

‘That’s so, Barton,’ Denton answered, wagging his head sorrowfully; ‘that’s so.’

‘But then, you see,’ Tom pursued, slowly and weightily arguing the case out to himself, rather than with his companion, ‘me and his mother never guessed it’d be so, or could be so. We thought the mud was going to stick for ever. It hasn’t stuck, Denton. I can look everybody in the face, and no man points a finger at me. There’s two or three here in the same boat with me. There’s two or three living in the same kind o’ glass-house, and there’s no

stone-throwing allowed; but all that apart, the thing's forgot.'

'My dear fellow,' said Denton, 'I know there's no man in the colonies more highly respected than yourself. If you had never parted with your son, he would have had advantages just as great as those he now enjoys. But that is not the question. You want to decide what you are to do now.'

'That's pretty easy,' Barton answered, taking firm hold of his beard in both hands, and tugging strongly at it. 'If I was to tell the boy the truth to-day, and if he was to come back to me, the folks would want to know why. I should have to tell the whole story; I should fix the old ticket on again—the "Convict Millionaire!" I can't do it, for his sake, Denton.'

'No,' Denton assented, 'you can't do it, for his sake. The disguise has been worn too long.'

Barton sat leaning forward, with his elbows on his knees and his beard in his hands,

staring with a calm intentness at the other. Suddenly he arose with a start and clapped his hands together.

‘His mother,’ he cried, with a voice of great agitation. ‘Good Heavens! what a fool I am! If his mother sees his face and hears his name, she’ll know him in a minute.’

He tore the French window open and made a step out on to the lawn, but, checking himself, suddenly returned.

‘I can’t go,’ he said, ‘I’m not fit to face her. Go you, Denton, and ask her to come here, there’s a good fellow. Bring her away quiet.’

‘Good,’ said Denton, and without another word left the apartment.

Barton walked up and down like a caged creature, pausing now and then to wring his hands together. He hardly knew as yet how profoundly he was agitated. The boy had been always a kind of angel-vision to him. He had never grown any older, or taller, or

stronger than he had been when the Dogdyke's had taken charge of him, and borne him to England, all those years ago. A little blue-eyed, tow-headed, merry fellow, tumbling hither and thither, busily intent on his infantile concerns, always ready for a game at romps, or a ride on the father's shoulders. Now he was back again, a grown man and a stranger, within a score of yards of the father whose heart yearned after him, and yet ignorant of his very existence. If Barton had followed his own way he would have gone out and taken him in his arms before them all. There was an actual pain—an actual physical pain—in his very arms, as he reached them out in the air as if to clasp his boy. He stopped his walk suddenly, and stood with bent head and clenched teeth. He made a clumsy downward motion with both hands, again and again repeated, and muttered to himself in a choked voice, that this would not do—this would not do at all. He thought of his wife, and of the suffering this strange

accident would bring her, and the tears gathered thickly in his eyes. He brushed them away, and strode up and down again. Denton returned, and seeing him thus engaged, spoke by way of warning :—

‘This way, Mrs. Barton.’

Tom stopped in his agitated promenade, and stood with both hands half extended, to await his wife. She came in flushed and smiling, and looking distinctly handsome. She was fashionably dressed, and very unlike the Mary Barton of old days ; but the good kind face had hardly changed at all. There was a little grey in her hair and a few lines were traced upon her forehead ; but Time, on the whole, had dealt tenderly with her, and her eyes were as bright and her cheek was as firm and rosy as of old. A handsome matronly-looking woman in early middle age, all her charms fully ripened and none as yet decayed. She had been amongst ladies in her early life, and with the quick facility of imitation which distinguishes her sex, she had

caught something of their manner and bearing. Part of that had been rubbed away in the rougher life of Tasmania, but with prosperous settled city life the old manner had come back again, had even been improved upon, and now sat easily upon her. She looked every inch a lady, but when she spoke there still lingered on her tongue a touch of the old countrified mid-England drawl.

‘Why, Tom,’ she said, catching sight of her husband’s face, ‘what’s the matter? You look quite put out.’

Denton had withdrawn, and had closed the French window behind him. He gave a little sidelong nod at Tom as he walked away.

‘Sit down, my dear,’ said the husband, taking both her hands in his, and speaking in a shaken voice.

‘Don’t frighten me, Tom,’ she said, half in jest and half in earnest. ‘Tell me what has happened. I declare you’re trembling.’

‘Sit down, my dear,’ Tom answered. He

spoke with a gravity so weighty that she instantly obeyed him, and took the chair which Denton had a few minutes before vacated. Tom, leaning heavily on the chair he himself had occupied, and grasping the top of it with both hands, looked down at her.

‘My dear,’ he said, ‘I’ve had strange news.’

‘Bad news?’ she asked.

He read a little flash of courage in her eyes which seemed to say that, whatever it might be, she would be prepared to meet it.

‘It isn’t bad news, my dear,’ he answered, ‘but it’s what I said it was—strange news. Brace yourself up, my dear. Denton’s had a letter from Michael—from our boy.’

She rose and came close to him.

‘Yes?’ she said.

‘The lad writes Denton that he’s comin’ to Australia. He was to follow his letter in a week. He talks about coming to Sydney.’

‘Yes?’ said Mary.

‘Denton,’ pursued Tom, ‘didn’t get the

letter for awhile, and had no chance of preparing us till to-day.'

‘No?’ she said, in mechanical assent.

Tom saw that her mind was half-stunned by the intelligence, and that she did not fully grasp what he was saying. He put an arm about her waist, and leading her back to the chair from which she had arisen, knelt down beside her, and took her hands in his.

‘My dear, Michael’s in Australia. He’s in Sydney. If you’d like to see him you can at almost any minute. I’ve been thinkin’, darlin’, we can’t undo, now, what we’ve done. To let on that he belongs to us would just wake up the old story. We must let it sleep, my dear. We must let it sleep.’

‘He’s here in Sydney?’ she asked, tremulously.

‘Yes, my dear. He’s in Sydney. I’ve—I’ve seen him.’

‘You’ve seen him?’ she answered, with a faint, quick cry. ‘Seen him? He’s here, Tom! Here! ’

‘Yes, my darlin’,’ Tom answered, ‘he’s here—on the lawn. Keep cool, old girl! Have a good heart! I know what it’s been to you all these years, and I know what it’s been to me. We’ve suffered, both of us, and we’ve got to suffer; but, darlin’, he’s a handsome lad—he’s as like you as he can be. I saw him talkin’ to the Governor just now, and somethin’ made him smile. He looked at me just then, and it was like your own face, my dear. Just like your own face!’

He had his arms about her by this time, and her head was resting on his shoulder. Neither of them knew it, but they were both crying silently.

‘Tom!’ she said, ‘I must see him. I *must* see him.’

‘Come with me,’ said Tom.

CHAPTER XV

TOM opened the door leading to the inner portion of the house, and, looking guiltily about him to see that the way was clear, beckoned to her to follow. They stole, thief-like, on tip-toe along a corridor, up a flight of stairs, and into a room which overlooked the big marquee and the glittering crowd of visitors. Tom closed and locked the door and led his wife to the window. To their tear-blurred eyes the bright sun-lit toilets and coloured parasols of the ladies shivered and changed like the patterns in a kaleidoscope. But by-and-by things grew clearer. Since Tom had left the lawn the position of parties had changed, and for a while his eye sought the figure of his son in vain. At length he discerned him standing at some distance, talk-

ing to a pretty and engaging girl, who was a stranger to the host. He drew his wife to his side and pointed.

‘ You see them two,’ he said, falling unconsciously back into the broadest accent of his youth ; ‘ them two out there—that bit of a wench in blue—all in light blue—boots and frock and gloves and everything, out there in a straight line with the gate ? ’

‘ Yes, yes,’ his wife whispered faintly.

‘ That’s him,’ said Tom, in a husky whisper, ‘ that’s him talking to her.’

They drew closer yet together, and their eyes gloated on their boy, who, ignorant of their gaze and even of their existence, stood talking and listening with an air of great gaiety and animation.

‘ Tom,’ said Mary.

‘ Mary,’ said Tom.

The mother began to sob.

‘ Tom,’ she said, ‘ he mustn’t go away any more.’

Barton was silent, and she cast one swift,

eloquent, despairing glance at him. If it had not been for his supporting arm she would have fallen.

‘I know,’ she went on brokenly, ‘I know, Tom, it’s all mad and silly, but oh, I am his mother after all. It’s hard that he should be so near and never know us, never care for us.’ She stretched out her arms towards the unheeding stranger, who was yet her child. ‘My dear, my dear, if I only dared,’ she said.

In the mother’s mind, as in the father’s, the child cherished in remembrance had never altered. Theoretically, of course, he had grown up to manhood, and she had striven a hundred thousand times to picture him as he would seem to other eyes. She had had vague images of him at all periods of his life, but they were shadowy, unreal, undefined. A little toddling child shone through all of them; the tow head and the chubby cheeks, the blue eyes and laughing lips of the baby, the dimpled arms and hands, the roguish little ways, the merry laugh, these shone

upon her eyes or sounded in her ears in countless hours of reverie, and now it seemed as if the baby had grown to be a man in a minute. It was curious, and yet natural, that whilst Tom had seen his wife's face in his son's, she saw her husband's there. There was a blended resemblance to them both, one of those subtle tricks of Nature by which she so often preserves a double likeness in a single countenance.

The young fellow stood very erect and stalwart and lithe, handsome and vivacious, and a pang of maternal pride shot through Mary's heart as she looked at him. Not even Tom himself in their far-off courting days had ever looked so regal to her. He was taller than his father, and when his figure came to be thoroughly set would be broader in the shoulders. He carried his head rather proudly, she thought, and looked as if he were born to rule mankind. But that came easy to a mother's fancy, and she would certainly have thought it had he grown up beside her. But

now all these impressions were a thousand-fold more keen, and every one was poignant with pain and pleasure. The gay crowd shifted to and fro, and the babble of their voices ascended indistinctly through the French window to the watchers' ears. Michael Hawthorne and his companion stood a little detached from the rest, and in a while began to move away. They sauntered side by side until they reached the gate, and after a little pause passed through the gateway and moved out of sight.

‘Tom,’ said Mary, drying her eyes and speaking in a steadier voice than before, ‘I must see him and speak to him. I can’t let him go away and never have heard his voice.’

‘Think what you’re doing, dear,’ Tom answered solicitously. ‘It’s a dreadful thing for both of us, but we’ve made our bed and we must lie on it. It’s too late to change it now.’

‘I know that,’ she responded. ‘I’ve suffered for it all these years, and now I must

go on with it. It was meant for his good all along, and it must be kept from him now. I'll be brave.'

'I misdoubt,' said Tom, 'you'll find it too great a trial for your strength.'

'No, no,' she cried imploringly, 'don't deny me, Tom. Let me have my way in this. He shall never guess anything. He shan't know, I promise you that. You can trust me, Tom.'

'Take a little while to think about it, dear,' Tom urged her. 'Take a little while to get ready for it anyhow.'

'Yes, yes,' she answered, 'I'll wait a day or two.'

'The folks will think it odd,' said Tom, after a lengthy pause, 'that we're both away. I must make a shift to pull myself together, and get down among them. You stop here, my love.'

He kissed her and stole away to the door, still moving guiltily and as if in fear of detection, and a few minutes later his wife saw him on

the lawn mingling with his guests. His sturdy voice reached her ears, and once he laughed loudly and, as she thought, unnaturally. She watched the gateway for half an hour in the hope that Michael would reappear. But he did not return, and in a while the trained resolution of her nature asserted itself and she became once more composed. She removed the traces of her tears, and descended to the lawn. The Governor and his party had arrived some few minutes before Denton had pointed out Michael to Tom Barton, but the young man was not then with them, or the hostess could not have escaped an introduction to him. She was now certain that the name and its owner's resemblance to his father would have at once enlightened her as to his identity, and she was devoutly thankful to have escaped the trial. She felt that she could bear it now if it should prove inevitable. Moving amongst her guests she tried to fix a smile upon her face, and to seem as gay and unembarrassed as she actually had been a

little while before. But she was ghastly pale, and her heart kept a dreadful riot in her breast, and the smile was a miserable failure.

'You are ill, Mrs. Barton,' said one of her acquaintances, with a startled voice and look.

'No, no,' she answered. 'Don't mind me. It will pass off. It's nothing.'

At this instant Tom, catching sight of her, and understanding clearly the anguish she endured, made his way hurriedly towards her and besought her to retire. They were both so unlike themselves that a general curiosity and fear began to spread. Tongues were hushed and glances half of consternation and half of sympathy were turned towards them. Here and there conversation went on, but in spite of that the silence grew marked, and little by little it deepened.

'My dear,' Tom whispered, 'they're all staring at us. You're not fit to be out here. Go back again.'

At this instant Michael Hawthorne and the young lady whom he had before accompanied

passed through the gate together and advanced across the lawn. The girl, with a nod and a smile, left him and walked over to General Mallard, who was still in conversation with the Governor. She slid her arm into his, and looked at him affectionately. The General turned for a moment and patted her cheek, and then resumed his speech. Hawthorne walked towards Denton, who, purposely disregarding the growing silence, was laying down the law of extradition to a Victorian judge of his acquaintance and arguing stoutly. He had turned his back upon Barton and his wife, and was doing his best to beat down the general uneasy feeling. Hawthorne slid a hand round his elbow and linked his arm with his, as a son might have done with a father. There was a very sincere affection between these two, and Denton looked up with a face which the young man thought was strangely troubled. The old gentleman turned to renew his argument, but his manner was changed, and with it his shrewdness and clearness of

statement were gone. He boggled—faltered—cried back—broke down.

‘My wits are muddled,’ he said testily; ‘I had the whole argument clear a minute back, and now it’s gone. Old age! Old age!’ He tried to give his words a certain whimsical air of humour, and his opponent caught the tone, and laughed.

‘Mr. Denton,’ said a voice close by. It was so altered that for a moment he did not know it, and he gave a nervous start when, turning, he saw Mary Barton’s pale face and excited eyes close to his own, and identified her as the speaker.

‘Yes, madame,’ he answered.

‘Won’t you introduce your friend to me?’ she asked.

He gave her a glance which narrowly escaped betrayal. Hawthorne saw it, and momentarily wondered what might be the meaning of it.

‘Certainly, Mrs. Barton,’ Denton answered, recovering himself suddenly. ‘This is our

hostess, Mrs. Barton, Hawthorne. This, Mrs. Barton, is Michael Hawthorne, once a ward of mine.'

Hawthorne raised his hat and bowed, but his hostess holding out her hand, he offered his own, and for a little space they stood looking at each other, he, though amazed, with a respectful deference in his air, and she seeming to devour him with her glance. He had never seen a look so strange on human face before, and it puzzled him profoundly, and, in some strange, unintelligible way, moved him as deeply. There was an ineffable appeal and longing in it, or a something which he could only construe in that fashion. She held his hand and gave no sign of surrendering it for fully half a minute, and under such circumstances time has a knack of lengthening incredibly. At last she withdrew her hand.

'I am very pleased to have met you, Mr. Hawthorne,' she said, in a voice utterly unlike her own. 'Very pleased, indeed.'

With that she gave an inclination of the head and moved away. Hawthorne, Denton, and the judge looked at each other in astonishment.

‘Strange,’ said the judge, turning his head over his shoulder to look at her.

‘Ah,’ said Denton, ‘she is very ill, poor creature. Her husband has advised her to retire and rest, but she won’t leave her guests. She’s one of the dearest women in the world, and we can’t afford to lose her. I shall add my counsel to Barton’s. They’re old friends of mine, and I can venture to take a liberty.’

Denton moved away, anxious to escape any questions Hawthorne might put to him. He was conscious of a certain querulous indignation against Mrs. Barton for having risked such an encounter so soon after the receipt of the intelligence her husband had conveyed to her. He had a high opinion of her; but it was tinctured by a confirmed old bachelor’s views of the sex in general. His interference was not needed, for Mary,

taking her husband's arm, had returned to the house, and did not reappear. He lingered with various knots of people, chatting disjointedly, and of a set purpose avoided Hawthorne. But the young man pursued him, and at last took renewed possession of him by the arm.

'You must ask me to dine with you to-night,' he said, 'unless you are engaged already. I've something that I wish particularly to say to you.'

'Very good, my boy; very good,' returned Denton.

Hawthorne drew him a little on one side, and began, as Denton had feared he would, to question him.

'The lady,' he said, 'to whom you introduced me just now?—wasn't there something very strange in her manner?'

'She's not well; she's not well,' the old gentleman answered, with a purposed note of irritation in his tone.

'But did you observe,' asked Hawthorne,

‘ how strangely she looked at me? Is she quite——’ He paused there as if afraid to employ the word he had in his mind.

‘ No,’ snapped Denton; ‘ she’s not at all! Not in the slightest! Not in the least degree! Nonsense! Absurd! You don’t know her. A better woman never breathed. A clearer-headed woman never lived. She’s unwell, poor thing.’

‘ My dear sir,’ began Hawthorne, in a half-laughing protestation against Denton’s angry tone.

‘ My dear Michael,’ returned Denton, ‘ we’ll say no more about it. The poor lady is ill, and ought not to have been here at all. She’s enduring a great anguish, to my personal knowledge.’

With that he disengaged himself, and walked away in search of the Victorian judge, with whom he immediately renewed his argument. Hawthorne, lingering alone, fell into a brown study. The memory of that strange look haunted him, and do what he

would, he could not banish it from his mind. He could see it as clearly as if it were in actual presence before him, and he could read in it no sign of bodily suffering. He could find nothing in it, but that strange appeal and longing which it had at first and at once conveyed to his mind. Somehow, in a dim, confused fashion, he thought the face familiar ; the expression it had worn, and still wore, for him, was absolutely not, but the face itself was, surely, surely. He dived into the recesses of his memory, but could not recall any face of which it reminded him. But the truth was that in his mother's features he had caught a reflection of his own, and if he had known enough to have sent him to a consultation with his mirror, he would have found there what he sought for elsewhere in vain.

CHAPTER XVI

SHORTLY after this Hawthorne succeeded in leading Miss Mallard away from the crowd. It was done by a series of carefully arranged little accidents. The gardens had plenty of wandering walks and shady places, and the bulk of the visitors held by the lawn, where the rank and fashion had their centres, and by the big marquee which held the refreshments.

Miss Mallard was a charming girl, who had views and opinions of her own on all manner of things. She was full of ideas, which, without being very clearly defined perhaps, influenced her character and action strongly. She liked to believe that if she had been born in Russia she would have been on the popular and less safe of the two unsafe

sides, and she thought that martyrdom in the great cause of freedom was an enviable thing. She had imbibed a good deal of the modern socialistic doctrine, only she was for levelling up instead of down, and for putting twelve eggs into everybody's basket without the disagreeable preliminary of robbing anybody's hen-roost. She had read and thought and felt a great deal, and her political ideas were all lovable, and all naïvely impossible for any time prior to the millennium. She believed ardently in the equality of the sons and daughters of Adam, but she could not help having been born and bred a lady. Vulgarity hurt her, and it happened often that her theories and her feelings were at war. She was gracious and gentle to everybody, but that was probably less due to political conviction than to the sincere cordiality and sweetness of her nature. Hawthorne was pleased to know that Miss Mallard thought little of the rights and privileges of birth. He had never imagined for a moment that his fortune, large

as it was, would have much impression on her, and though he had been bred like a gentlemen, he had a curious uncertainty about his family origin.

‘I have always thought you were an Englishman, Mr. Hawthorne,’ the girl was saying.

‘No,’ he answered, ‘I was born in Tasmania.’

‘I’ve not seen Tasmania,’ she said, brightly. ‘Tell me something about it.’

‘I know nothing,’ Hawthorne responded. ‘I was sent away when I was two years old. It is rather an odd history; would it bore you very much if I spoke about it?’

‘No, indeed,’ she responded. ‘I should like to hear.’

The words were spoken with a candid simplicity which at once charmed and pained him. If she had cared as much to hear as he would have liked her to care, he thought, she might have been less ready to express an interest.

'I was an orphan at two years old. An old convict, but a splendid fellow, and a man who, as it seems, was actually known to be innocent of the crime with which he was charged, was my father's partner. He saved me from a flood which swept away father, mother, and everybody. Only old Tom and his wife and I came alive out of it,' he continued.

'He must have made a strange nurse for a child, Mr. Hawthorne.'

'It seems that he made a very good one. He and my father had bought a considerable stretch of land. It turned out to be rich in cinnabar and silver. Old Tom floated a company, and kept most of the shares for himself and me. That is where all my money comes from.'

'Did he manage your affairs honestly?'

'He managed them with scrupulous fidelity from first to last. He might have taken every penny that I had, and nobody would have been the wiser. He might have shipped me

away to England, and sent money enough to clothe and feed me in the simplest way, and still have seemed a benefactor.'

'He must have been a very noble fellow. Is he still alive?' Miss Mallard asked him.

'He is still alive, and is living at this time, I fancy, in this very colony. Mr. Denton knows him personally, and I must get him to give me his address.'

'It is a strange story, Mr. Hawthorne.'

'Yes, it's a strange story—it's all strange. There can't be many men with so bewildering a history behind them as I have. Do you know, Miss Mallard, I have tried my best, in England, this last five years to find out where my father and mother came from, and I've met with nothing but blank failures. I'm here, and I've got a pot of money, and that's all that's known about me. It's all I know about myself. There never was a man who had less chance of finding a pedigree.'

She prompted him by no further questions, and they walked on, side by side, in silence.

The sun's rays fell slantwise now, and the headlands took a richer colour. The wash of the waters reached their ears: the sky was without a cloud. Miss Mallard's eyes dreamed on the horizon, and every now and again Hawthorne stole a look at her. She seemed unconscious of his presence, and he thought that her fancies, whatever they might be, were far away from him. Presently they left the inclosure into which they had sauntered, and came upon a broad stretch of down which lay between it and the cliff. There was a rustic seat close at hand, shadowed and retired, though not far from the winding path which lay across the coarse and scanty turf.

‘Will you rest here for a little while, Miss Mallard?’ Hawthorne asked, indicating the rustic seat by a motion of the hand.

‘I'm not in the least tired,’ she answered.

‘Will you do me the honour of listening to me for a few minutes?’

‘Certainly, Mr. Hawthorne.’

The calmness of her reply made him very

nervous, and he grew more than ever fearful of her response to what he had to say.

'Shall we sit down here?' he began. 'I spoke to General Mallard yesterday. Has he told you the nature of our conversation?'

'No, he has not mentioned it.'

'I asked him not to do so. I left it, of course, to his entire discretion, but I told him I would prefer to speak myself.'

He was careful to give no sign of the inward perturbation which shook him, but he thought that she must have known what was coming by this time, and her coolness augured the worst for him. Her eyes met his with a simple gravity, no more, no less.

'I've allowed myself to talk to you of my past life,' he said, finding that she did not help him out in any way. 'I've done so for a purpose. I should not like to seem to sail under false colours in a case like this. I've told General Mallard all about myself, and he puts no obstacle in my way. He leaves the matter entirely to your decision.'

He paused again, and again she gave him no help. She turned away her face from him, and that seemed terrible. He could see the outline of her cheek, and the little pink ear with bright curling hair clustering round it. She bent her head and trailed the point of her sunshade hither and thither in the turf. 'I have been trying to find the courage to tell you this for a long time,' he said clumsily, to his own way of thinking. 'I fell in love with you when I first saw you; I have gone on loving you ever since, and I can't tell you how much you have changed me.' She gave no sign at all, and he was easily disheartened, as some kinds of lovers are. He was chock full of the humblest opinions about himself just then, disparaging his personal aspect and mental endowments and spiritual qualities all round. As a rule he had no self-consciousness to talk of, but when he sat himself side by side with Clara Mallard he grew a little morbid in the analysis of his own claims to value, and felt absolutely humble. 'Miss Mallard,' he

went on after a pause, which seemed terrible to him, 'I know my own presumption. I know my own unworthiness, but I can't help loving you. Do you think you can bring yourself to care for me? Do you?'

She kept silent still, and he took her disengaged hand, not knowing that he did so, in both his own. He murmured his query again and again, but still she answered nothing. She allowed him to hold the gloved hand, however, and made no effort to release it. Miss Mallard had gone through the preliminaries of this scene perhaps a score of times, with as many different people. She had always borne herself with the most admirable *sang froid*, and no gentleman had hitherto dared to take her hand in this fashion. She had had impetuous and impassioned suitors, too, but she had known how to keep them at a distance. But in this case there was a difference, and in spite of her experience, she felt for a moment as gauche and embarrassed as a school-girl. A step sounded near at hand

upon the pathway, and Hawthorne had but just time enough to assume an attitude and expression of utter unconcern when the Count von Herder appeared, smoking a cigarette and looking imperturbably happy, as if the recent fact of being kicked out of a gentleman's house most excellently agreed with him. He glanced at the pair through his golden spectacles, raised his hat with a lofty grace, and strolled by magnificently. Miss Mallard, though she did not know him, offered a slight return to his salute, for she was not entirely sure of the manners of the land, and was always willing to meet civility with kindness. Hawthorne made no response whatever, and the Count went on until he was just on a level with their seat ; then, turning suddenly with an air of a man struck by a recollection, he raised his hat a second time, and standing with bare bent head, rounded shoulders, and each hand at a level with the elbow, opened his mouth and spoke :

‘I bek your pardon, Mr. Hawthorne,’ he said, ‘but I am charged to deliver to you a

message of very great importance. May I ask if it will suit your convenience for me to gall upon you at any time to-morrow?' Now, had this query been propounded anywhere but in the presence of Miss Mallard, it is probable that Hawthorne would have disdained to answer, but he did not care in her presence even to hint at the existence of a quarrel, though the right was absolutely on his side, and though the Count von Herder was a personage with whom no man who respected himself would hold unnecessary converse.

'I am engaged for the whole of to-morrow, Count von Herder,' he said stiffly.

'Shall we say then the next tay?' questioned the Count.

'I am engaged on the next day also,' Hawthorne answered.

'Goot,' replied Von Herder, looking up with a happy smile. 'Then we vill say at ten in the morning on Saturday. Shall I make an appointment to meet you at the club?'

'At the club,' Hawthorne answered, seeing that the man was not to be shaken off.

'I'll be there,' returned the Count. And with two profound and deliberate bows he resumed his hat and continued his walk.

'Who is that gentleman?' asked Miss Mallard.

'That is Count von Herder,' Hawthorne responded. 'I met him in Berlin.'

He had given the man a rendezvous in the girl's hearing, and he could not abuse him after that. The Count's appearance seemed unpropitious. It was not easy to get back to a subject broached with so much difficulty a while ago. Miss Mallard felt this, and when the silence was growing a little embarrassing contrived to precipitate matters.

'We must rejoin our friends,' she said. This gave Hawthorne the chance he wanted, and he seized upon it with avidity.

'Not until you have answered my question,' he pleaded. 'Don't go until you have told me. You don't know what suspense

means to me, you can't know.' Now if Miss Mallard had been asked plainly and in so many words whether she would have consented to marry a man who knew absolutely nothing of his own antecedents except that his father had once been in partnership with a convict, it is very likely that she would have answered No. But in Michael Hawthorne's case it mattered very little. She had known him by repute these ten years. The young Tasmanian millionaire had been a good deal talked about in society, and the mothers of England had exhausted ingenuity in attempts to marry him. He had belonged to the very best set, and had had access to the best places since he was eighteen years of age, and had known the most distinguished people. It was not as if he had just sprung from nowhere with his two millions behind him.

The story he had told her was curious and interesting, and a little out of the common, and it had no more than added a touch of romance to her thoughts of him ; for Miss Mallard was

very strangely prepossessed in this young gentleman's favour, and without being absolutely head over ears in love with him as he was with her, she was persuaded that he was one of the highest minded and most unselfish of men. She thought well of his personal appearance, and she knew that his manners were charming. She had not known altogether how deeply interested she had been in Michael Hawthorne until his proposal came upon her.

It would be nonsense to say that it took her by surprise, for she had been more or less expecting it for months ; but there is a difference between expecting a thing and having it. And when, spurred by her continued silence, he began to plead his suit with ardour, when he began to talk about her beauty, and her goodness, and her intelligence, and to tell her how delightful all her attributes made her, and how she glorified them, she began to thrill and tremble ever so little. She was quite sure it was nonsense ; she was quite sure it was not true that she was the most beautiful,

and the cleverest, and the best girl in the whole wide world ; but in spite of its obvious absurdity, it was not unpleasant to listen to, and it was really very delightful to know that Hawthorne believed it all, and so at length she capitulated, and Hawthorne went into the seventh heaven. Then he lauded her to her face so rapturously and shamelessly that she began to blush most beautifully, and to be half afraid of him and his ardour ; and when he held her gloved hand in both of his and kissed it again and again—a most improper and reprehensible thing to do in broad daylight, and in the open air, within earshot of the babble of a hundred voices—she found it time definitely to retreat.

Even then he pursued her, with arduous eyes and one whispered question often repeated. Did she love him ? Only ever so little—did she—did she ? Would she try—would she—would she ? It was not easy to go back and face the battery of glances which, both to Hawthorne's fancy and the girl's,

awaited them on the lawn, and so they strolled about a little to recover self-possession and the looks of innocence. Miss Mallard put a definite veto on the continuance of the conversation on the lines on which Hawthorne had started it.

‘I'll try,’ she said at last, in answer to his repeated question. ‘But now,’ she added, with an exquisite frank shyness, ‘we must choose another theme. If you speak one other word on the old one I shall leave you at the instant.’

Hawthorne, who was of course at this time becomingly afraid of her, obeyed her injunction so far as silence went, but was not equally successful in the discovery of a new subject for converse. The young lady came to his aid.

‘Tell me,’ Mr. Hawthorne,’ she said, ‘about this curious old convict you were speaking of. You are quite sure he was innocent?’

‘Everybody who knows him is sure of it.’ Hawthorne answered. He told her the story

as he had received it from Denton and Sir Ferdinand.

‘He served his time in full?’ she asked.
‘That was something of a tragedy.’

‘Yes, it was, indeed, something of a tragedy. But I believe the world at large has long since definitely decided to forget all about it. The man, so Denton tells me, is universally respected now. Of course he is extremely wealthy. He’s a member of the Legislature, or was three years ago, when Denton heard from him. He had gained for himself the sobriquet of Honest Tom—Honest Tom Barton.’

She turned upon him with a look of undisguised amazement.

‘Honest Tom Barton!’ she repeated—
‘and do you mean to tell me seriously, Mr. Hawthorne, that you are going to inquire for his address?’

‘Yes,’ he said, in some astonishment.
‘Why should I not?’

‘There is very little need for it, indeed,’

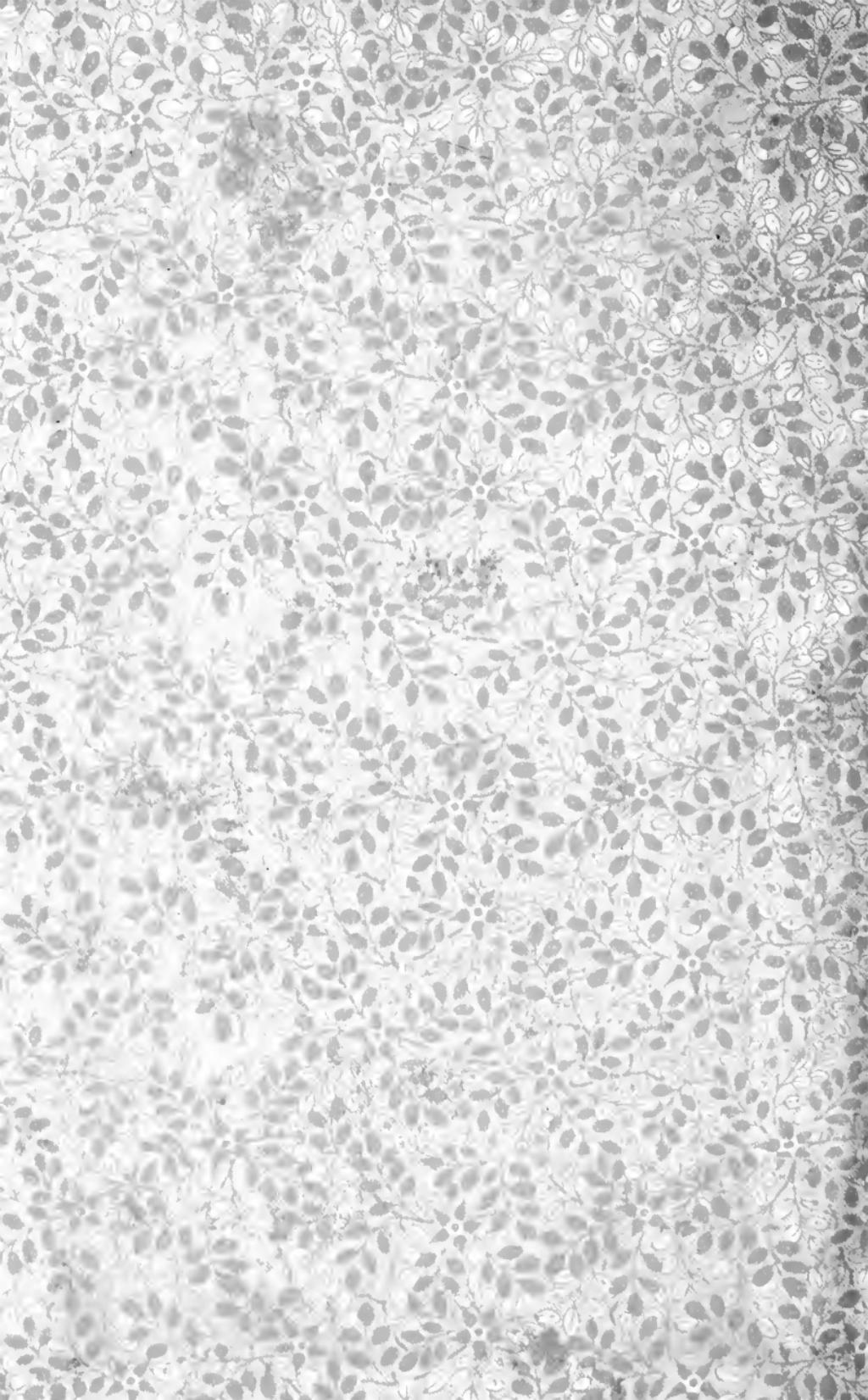
she answered. 'You are standing on his grounds. I quite understand now the strange way in which his wife received you. She had evidently expected you to know who she was, and to make at least some allusion to everything you owe her husband.'

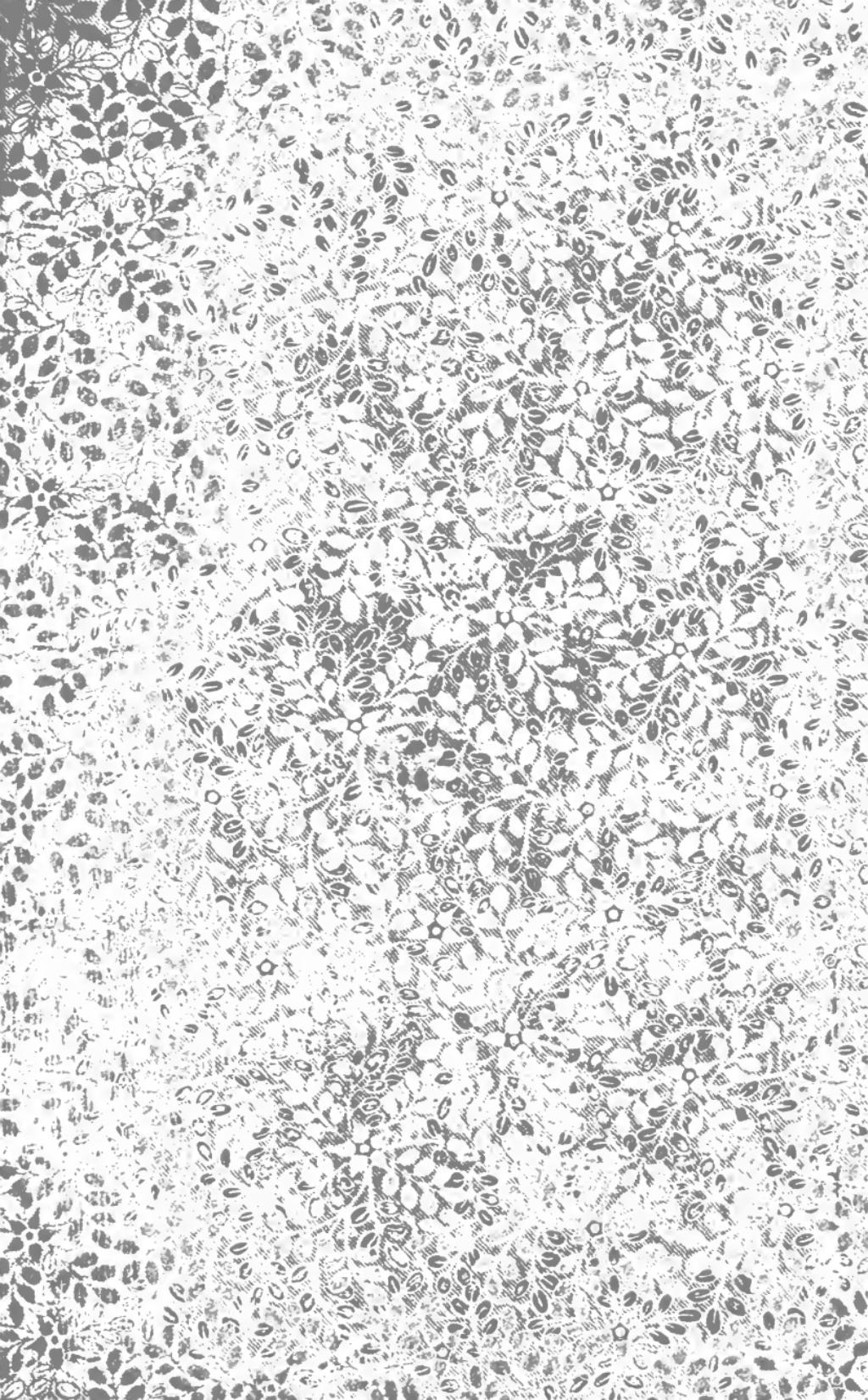
Hawthorne stood dumfounded. Ingratitude was for him one of the least possible of vices, and he had certainly seemed to be guilty of it in its most flagrant form.

'I must explain this at once. I will see Barton without delay, and will tell him that I came here in ignorance of his identity. The Governor told me this morning that there was a garden party, and asked me to accompany him. I came without a guess at my host's name, and when I was presented to Mrs. Barton, it never occurred to me to think that she was the wife of the man who saved my life. I must go at once and explain to him.'

'Certainly,' she answered; 'do not lose a moment.'







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